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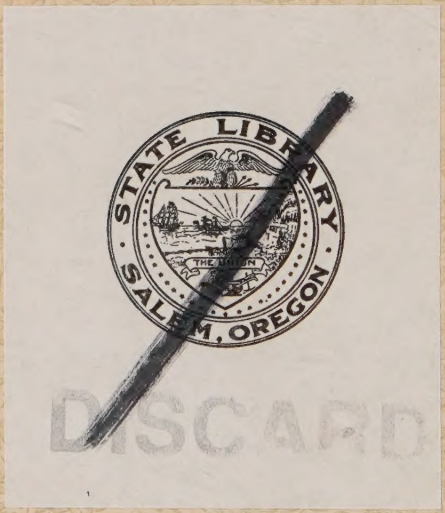

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ENOCH ARDEN.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.

ENOCH ARDEN.

I.

Beyond a break in the cliff, and above the yellow beach, where the waves foam in to shore, lie some red roofs clustered about a narrow wharf. Then comes a mouldered church, and, higher yet, a long street that climbs towards a mill with a tall tower. Behind these again, and standing clear against the sky, are a gray down, with Danish barrows, and a hazelwood which rises out of the down.

Here, among the waste lumber and coils of rope, fishing-nets, rusty anchors, and drawn-up boats, three children played together a hundred years ago, building sand castles or following up and flying away from the white breakers. They were named Annie Lee, the prettiest little maid of the port; Philip Ray, the miller's son; and Enoch Arden, an orphan, son of a rough sailor who had been lost one winter in a storm.

There was a narrow cave in the cliff, and there the children played at keeping house. One day Enoch would be host, and the next

Philip, but Annie was always mistress, whoever might be master. Then sometimes Enoch got possession and held it for a whole week.

"This is my house and my little wife," he said.

"Mine too," Philip hotly returned.

But if they came to blows, Enoch, who was larger and sturdier, was always victor in the end, and Philip, with tears in his blue eyes, trembled with helpless anger.

"I hate you, Enoch!" he would shriek out.

At this the little wife would fall to weeping for company and beg them to stop quarrelling for her sake.

"I will be a little wife to both of you," she sobbed through her tears.

But, after a while, when the dawn of childhood had gone well towards morning and Enoch and Philip felt a new warmth of life in their veins, each one fixed his heart on Annie. Enoch declared his love to her, but Philip remained silent. Annie seemed kinder to Philip, but she really loved Enoch, though she did not know it and would have denied it.

From that time forth Enoch had but one purpose in life. He hoarded all his savings to the utmost farthing to buy a boat and make a home for Annie. He prospered well, and along the whole coast there was not a luckier or bolder fisherman. He also served a year on

board a merchantman and made himself a full sailor. More than once he had saved a life, and all his comrades were proud of him. Then, before he had reached his twenty-first year, Enoch bought his own boat and made a home for Annie. It was a neat little nest, perched halfway up the narrow street towards the mill.

But one autumn afternoon, when all the younger people of the town went nutting to the hazelwood, Philip, whose father was sick and needed him, was an hour late. As he climbed the hill and approached the edge of the trees he saw Enoch and Annie, who were sitting there hand in hand. Enoch's large gray eyes and weather-beaten face were kindled by an inward fire. Philip looked in their faces and read his doom. Then, as they drew closer together, he groaned and slipped away, down into the hollows of the wood, like a thing wounded. He could hear the merry shouts of the rest come faintly through the leaves, but to him it was a dark hour. He rose up after the struggle was subdued and went down to his home, bearing an insatiable hunger in his heart.

Enoch and Annie were married at last, and then came seven happy years of health and plenty. Their earliest child was a daughter, and Enoch, when he heard his baby's first cry, resolved to save all he could to give her a better

bringing-up than his or his wife's had been. The wish was redoubled when a boy came two years later. He was the idol of Annie's solitary life while Enoch was at sea, or when he was journeying inland with his white horse and load of fish for the neighbor housewives.

But there came a change before very long. A larger haven opened ten miles farther north, and there Enoch was accustomed to go very often by sea and land. Once, when he was clambering up a mast at that place, he slipped and fell. When he was lifted from the deck they found he had broken his leg. Then while he lay in the town there recovering, Annie bore him another son, which was meagre and sickly. Some one else began to supply Enoch's customers during his absence, and his trade was lost. He was a God-fearing man enough, yet doubt and gloom seemed to fall on him. In his painful inaction he seemed to see his children leading low and miserable lives and Annie become a beggar. Then he prayed that Heaven would save them from this fate whatever might befall him; and even while he was praying the master of the ship he had served in, having heard of his accident, came and offered him the post of boatswain. He knew Enoch's worth and valued him. His vessel, he said, was bound for China, and wanted only a boatswain to complete her

crew. Would he go? There were a good many weeks yet before she sailed, and she would leave from that port. It seemed an answer to the prayer, and Enoch gladly accepted the offer.

Thus the dark cloud passed away; but what were the wife and children to do during his absence? Enoch lay pondering a long time on this subject, and the thought of selling his boat came to him. He loved her too much to part with her without a pang. He had weathered many a rough sea in her and knew her every trait as a rider does of his horse, and yet the one way out of his difficulty was to sell her. He could buy goods and stores then and set Annie up in trade. She could keep the house and care for the children in that way while he was gone. And then he would trade himself out yonder. He might make the voyage a number of times and return rich at last. Then he would be the master of a larger craft and make more profit, while he could lead a much easier life. All the children, too, should be educated, and he would pass his days among them in peace.

Thus Enoch dreamed, and when he was able to walk he went home. Annie was nursing the sickly baby, and she looked very pale and worn herself. But she started forward with a happy cry when he appeared, and laid the baby in his

arms. He took it and curiously handled all its little limbs. Then he weighed it and fondled it with father-like caresses. He had not the heart to break the news of his departure to Annie that day. He waited till to-morrow.

For the first time since Enoch had put the ring on her finger Annie opposed him. She was not harsh or violent, but entreated him with tears and mournful kisses all day and night long.

"Oh, Enoch, if you care for me or the dear children, do not go, do not go!"

But because he did care for her and the children Enoch resolved to go, and she pleaded in vain. Enoch parted with his old seafaring friend for the time and went to buy goods to set Annie up in business. His hammer and axe shook their pretty little home all day long as he worked away at the shelves for Annie's stock in trade. To Annie herself the noise sounded like the raising of her own scaffold. But at last all was in order, though the space was narrow enough, and Enoch went to bed tired out with his work.

The next morning was the last which he could spend at home; but he faced it boldly and brightly. He laughed Annie's fears away, yet as a brave, God-fearing man he bowed himself down and prayed for a blessing on his wife and little ones, whatever might come to him.

"Annie," he said, rising, "by the grace of God this voyage will bring us all fair weather. Keep a clean hearth and a clear fire for me, for I'll be back, my girl, before you know it." Then he rocked the cradle. "And he,—this weakling, —I love him all the better for it, God bless him,— he shall sit on my knees, and I'll tell him tales of foreign ports when I come home. He shall be merry too. Come, Annie, cheer up before I go."

At his hopeful words she began almost herself to hope. But when he talked more gravely of Providence and trust in Heaven she heard him as if in a dream.

"Oh, Enoch," she cried, "you are wise, and yet for all your wisdom I feel I shall never look into your face again."

"Well, then," said he, "I shall look into yours, Annie. The ship passes here. Get a seaman's glass and spy out my face and laugh your fears away."

The last moments came, but he kept his assumed cheerfulness till the end.

"Annie, my girl, be comforted, cheer up," he said again and again. "Look to the babies. Keep things ship-shape till I come back. Have no fear for me, for I must go. Cast your fears on God. He is an anchor which holds."

Then he rose from where he had been sitting and threw his strong arms about Annie's droop-

ing neck. He kissed the little ones fervently and fondly, except the third, the sickly one, who was asleep after a restless night. To him he leaned down and kissed him in his cradle. Annie clipped a tiny curl from the little one's forehead and gave it to Enoch, and he took it and kept it through all that happened to him. But now he hastily caught up his bundle, waved his hand from the door, and went his way.

When the time came for the vessel to go by, Annie borrowed a ship's glass, but she looked in vain. Perhaps she could not fix it to suit her eye, or perhaps her eye was dim and her hand trembled. At all events she did not see him, even though he stood waving on deck. In a moment the ship went past and he was out of sight behind the cliffs.

Then when the last dip of the sail had quite vanished she turned away, weeping. She mourned him as one who had died; but she did all as he had asked her. Nevertheless she did not thrive in her trade, for she had not been bred to the business and had little native shrewdness. She did not know how to ask enough for her wares, nor to lie when it was needful. More than once when wants pressed she sold for less than the goods had cost her, wondering all the while what Enoch would say.

At last she failed, and her heart was broken.

She expected news from Enoch day by day, but it never came, and she was forced to gain a poor sustenance with hard work, while she lived a life of silent endurance.

The third child, which was born sickly, grew more and more feeble, but she cared for it with all a mother's tenderest love. Yet her daily work called her often away from it, and she could not spare the money to get it what it most needed, nor to engage a doctor. After a lingering weakness, and before she was aware of it, the innocent little soul suddenly escaped like a caged bird and flitted away.

Now, since Enoch had left, Philip had never seen Annie, but when he heard that the little child had died, his heart accused him for having neglected her so long.

"Surely," he said to himself, "there is no harm in seeing her now. I may be of some little comfort to her."

He went therefore to Annie's cottage, and, passing through the bare little front room, paused a moment with a new emotion at an inner door. He knocked, and, no one coming to open it to him, entered uninvited.

Annie sat there, fresh from the burial of her child, and did not care to see any human face. Her own face was turned towards the wall, and she was weeping silently.

Philip faltered on the threshold. "Annie," he said at last,—"I came to ask a favor of you."

"What favor can you hope for from one so sad and forlorn?" she groaned.

He was abashed by her reply, but without being asked he sat down beside her, his bashfulness and tenderness struggling within him.

"I came to speak, Annie," he said in a faltering voice, "of what he—of what Enoch, your husband, wished. I've always said you chose the best man among us, strong and resolute. And why did he go away and leave you? Only for the wherewithal to provide for his little ones, to give them a better bringing up than his had been,—that was his wish; and if he comes back again, he will be vexed to find all the precious morning hours lost. It would torture him even in his grave if he thought his children were running wild here about the waste. So, Annie, we've known each other all our lives, haven't we? Now don't say no to what I am going to propose. Enoch can repay me when he comes back if you will have it so, Annie. I am rich, you know. Let me put the boy and girl to school."

Annie leaned with her brows against the wall and did not turn.

"I cannot look you in the face, Philip," she said. "I am sad and foolish. When you came in I was broken down by my sorrow, and now your kindness breaks me down again. But I know Enoch is alive. He will repay you,—money can be repaid; but your kindness never can."

"Then you will let me, Annie?" asked Philip.

She turned now and rose from her seat, fixing her swimming eyes on him. Then she called down a blessing on his generous head and wrung his hand passionately. They passed into the little garth beyond the door, and he went away lifted up mightily in spirit. Thus Philip came to have the boy and girl put to school, and he bought them all the needful books, and acted in every way as if they were his own children. For Annie's sake he seldom went down to see her. He sent her gifts by the children of garden-herbs, and fruit, and roses, or conies from the down, and now and then some flour from his tall mill, which he offered because it was so fine in the meal, thus disguising his charitable purpose.

Philip never knew what was in Annie's mind. She could scarcely utter the broken words of thanks out of her full heart when he met her. Yet he was all in all to the children. They would run from distant corners of the

street to greet him and receive his hearty welcome. They were lords of his house and mill and went to him with all their wrongs or pleasures. They hung on him, and played with him, and always called him Father Philip. He gained their love as Enoch lost it; for their real father was like a vision or a dream to them. No news had come from him for ten long years.

One evening Annie's children coaxed her to go nutting to the wood with them, and she said she would. Then they begged for Father Philip also, and went and found him at the mill, like a bee in blossom-dust.

"Come, Father Philip, we are going nutting," they cried.

But he would not go. Then they tugged at him playfully, and begged so hard that he laughed and went along. Was not she with them? he thought to himself.

After climbing half-way up the down just to where the wood began, Annie's strength failed her, and she sank to the ground with a sigh.

"Let me rest here," she said, wearily.

Philip was well content to do so, and he sat beside her, while the younger ones broke away with gleeful cries into the hazels and dispersed in search of nuts, calling to each other about the wood at each lucky find.

Philip forgot everything about him seated

there by her side. He remembered nothing but one dark hour he had spent there in the wood, when he had crept into the shadow to give way to his grief.

"Listen, Annie," at last he said, lifting up his honest forehead, "how merry they are down yonder. Tired, Annie?" he asked, for she did not answer,—"tired?"

Her face had fallen on her hands, and she was still silent.

Then, with a kind of uncontrollable anger, he spoke in a different voice:

"The ship was lost, the ship was lost! Why should you kill yourself and keep them orphans?"

"I did not think of that," said Annie; "but, I do not know why, somehow their voices made me feel so solitary."

Philip drew closer. "Annie," he said, "there is a thing upon my mind, and it has been so long there that although I do not know when it first came, yet I know it must out at last. Oh, Annie, it is beyond all hope, against all chance, that he should still be alive. Let me speak, then. I grieve, oh, so deeply, to see you poor and wanting help. I can never help you as I would like—unless—perhaps you know what I want you to know,—I wish you were my wife, Annie. I would be a father to your

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children. They love me already, I think, as a father. I'm sure I love them as if they were my own; and I believe that, even after all these uncertain years, we might still be happy if you were my wife. Think of it. I am well-to-do; I have neither kin nor care, and we have known each other all our lives. And, Annie, I've loved you longer than you ever knew."

Annie spoke tenderly, for she was deeply thankful to Philip.

"You have been like God's good angel to us, Philip. God bless you for it, and reward you with something far happier than I. Can one love twice? Could you ever be loved as Enoch was? What do you ask?"

"I am content to be loved a little after Enoch," he said.

"Dear Philip, wait awhile," she said, as if she were beginning to be scared. "If Enoch comes—yet he will not come. Yet, wait a year,—a year is not long. Surely I'll be wiser in a year."

"Annie, as I have waited all my life, I may well wait a little longer."

"Then you have my promise," she said. "In a year."

And Philip repeated, "In a year."

Both were silent, till, glancing up, Philip saw the streaming red of the sunset falling in

through the trees. He rose then, fearing the night and chill would do Annie harm. He called loudly up the wood, and the children came running in, laden with spoil. All went down to the port; and at Annie's door Philip paused and gave her his hand.

"Annie, when I spoke to you," he said, gently, "that was an hour of weakness. I was wrong. I am always bound to you; but you are free."

The tears came into Annie's eyes. "No, Philip, I am bound," she said.

II.

THE autumn went and another autumn came before Annie, in the round of her household duties, realized that a year had passed. Dwelling day by day on Philip's words, that he had loved her longer than she knew, she seemed to forget the passage of time; and now, once again, he stood at her door claiming a fulfilment of her promise.

"Is it a year already?" she asked.

"Yes, if the nuts are ripe again. Come out and see," he said.

But she put him off. She had so much to look after, and then it would be such a change. "Give me another month, Philip," she said. "Of course we are bound by our promise; but just a month,—no more."

Philip's eyes were full of his lifelong hunger, and his voice shook a little as a drunkard's hand will.

"Take your own time, Annie, take your own time," he said.

She could have wept for pity of him. Yet she held him on with excuse after excuse, testing his faithfulness and truth, till another half-year had slipped away.

By this time the gossips of the port began to chafe as if a personal wrong had been done them. Nothing distresses the species more than to have a calculation miscarry, and all their fine prophecies about Philip and Annie seemed to be coming entirely to naught. Some thought Philip was trifling with her, others that she held him off simply to draw him on. Others laughed at them as dallying people who did not know their own minds. One, a little bolder and more sinister than the rest, even hinted at a worse thing.

Annie's own son was silent, though he often enough expressed his wishes by his looks. But her daughter continually pressed her to marry Philip, who was so dear to all of them, and lift the household out of its poverty. Philip's rosy face grew pale and careworn with the suspense, and all these things fell upon Annie with a sharp reproach.

At last one night it happened that Annie could not sleep, and lying in bed she prayed for a sign from Enoch. Then, in the depth of the darkness, urged by the expectant terror in her heart, she started up and struck a light. She found the Bible and let her finger fall suddenly on the text, where it chanced to open.

"Under the palm-tree" were the words she first touched; but they conveyed no meaning to her, and she sadly closed the book and went back to bed.

Yet, strangely enough, she dreamed of Enoch sitting on a height under a palm-tree with the sun above him.

"He is gone," she thought; "he is happy up there, singing 'Hosanna in the highest.' The sun of Righteousness is above him, and the palms are those the people were strewing while they cried 'Hosanna in the highest.'"

Then she awoke and sent for Philip. "There is no reason now why we should not be married," she said wildly to him.

"Then for God's sake, for both our sakes," he answered, "if you will marry me, let it be at once."

So Philip and Annie were married, and the bells rang merrily through the port; but Annie's heart did not beat in unison with them. She seemed to hear a footstep falling always beside

her. She could not tell where it came from, nor could she catch the meaning of the whisper that was always at her ear. She feared to be left alone at home, and never ventured out without company. Before she entered, too, her hand always hesitated on the latch as if she dreaded to enter. Philip thought he knew what ailed her. Such doubts and fears were common to women in her state: so, when her child was born, she was herself again. She was a mother as of old, and Philip was all in all to her. The mysterious foreboding wholly disappeared from her mind.

III.

But where was Enoch? The ship "Good Fortune" sailed prosperously away, and at setting forth met with some severe storms in the Bay of Biscay. Unharmed by these, she slipped across the Equator, and, after a long tumble about the Cape, passed again through the summer world in the opposite hemisphere, and finally made anchor in her Oriental haven.

Enoch traded there for himself, and bought such curiosities as were salable in the home markets at that time. He also bought a gilded dragon for his babies.

But the return voyage was less lucky than the outward passage. At first, the good ship

floated day by day through the fair sea-circles of that latitude, scarcely sending a ripple from her bows. Then there were long calms, then variable and baffling winds. At last there came a storm which drove her onward until one day, just as the lookout cried, "Breakers ahead!" there was crash and ruin, and all were lost but Enoch and two others. They drifted half the night on broken tackle and spars, and in the early morning were cast on an island which was rich with vegetation, but seemed the loneliest spot in that far-away sea.

There was no lack of human sustenance in the place, soft fruits and great nuts or nourishing roots; nor was it hard to capture the helpless animals, which were so wild that they were tame. The three who were wrecked built a rude hut in a seaward-looking gorge of the mountains, which they thatched with palm-leaves. Here they lived amid an Eden of plenty; but they were ill content with their solitary lot, and longed for home.

The youngest of the party, hardly more than a boy, who had been hurt on the night of the wreck, lingered on for five weary years in a kind of living death. The others could not leave him, and made no effort to depart while he survived. After he was gone, the two remaining found a fallen trunk, which Enoch's

comrade attempted to hollow out with fire after the Indian fashion; but he was sunstruck at his work and died, leaving Enoch all alone. In these two deaths the deserted mariner seemed to read God's warning to wait.

Enoch daily saw the mountain, wooded up to its peak, and winding lawns and glades high on the slope, as if they were pathways to heaven. There was the drooping crown of plumes on the slender cocoa, and, through the foliage, the lightning-like flash of birds and insects. Then, too, the lustre of long convolvuluses that coiled around stately trunks and ran out to the very limit of the land. He saw all these, but what he desired with all his heart to see and hear—a kindly human face and a sympathetic voice—he was denied. He heard only the shrieks of ocean fowl, and the roller, a league long, thundering out on the reef; or he could listen, nearer his hut, to the whisper of the huge trees that blossomed up in the zenith, or the sweep of some precipitous rivulet plunging to the sea. He ranged up and down the shore with these sounds in his ears all day long, or sat in the gorge by his hut watching forever for a sail. The sunrise came every day, broken among the palms and precipices, with a blaze, first on the eastern waters, then day-long on his island, and finally a blaze on the western flood; then, after-

wards, the great stars would globe themselves in the sky, and the ocean would bellow with a hollower voice, until once again the scarlet sunrise would come,—but no sail ever came.

Often as he sat watching or seeming to watch, the golden lizard would pause upon him. A phantom made out of many phantoms haunted him, or he himself in fancy haunted people, or things, or places he had known at home: the babies and their babble, Annie, the small house, the climbing street, the mill, the leafy lanes, the horse he drove, his boat, the chilly November dawns, the gentle showers, the smell of dying leaves in autumn, and the low moan of his native seas.

Once, too, in the ringing of his ears, very faintly, but merrily, very far away, he heard the parish bells pealing. Then, though he did not know why, he started up shuddering, and when the beautiful but hated island returned upon him, if his poor heart had not spoken of the Divinity which, being everywhere, lets no one who speaks with Him seem alone, he would have surely died of solitude.

Thus, over Enoch's head, silvering early with grief, the sunny and rainy seasons came and went year after year. His hope one day to see his family and to pace the old familiar fields had not yet entirely perished, when his lonely doom came suddenly to an end.

Another ship, blown from her course by baffling winds like the "Good Fortune," anchored near the island, not knowing what land she had reached. At early dawn the mate had seen the streams falling down the inland hills, and had sent a crew to find water. They landed and burst away towards the water, filling the island with unaccustomed noises.

The long-haired and long-bearded solitary stepped down from his mountain gorge, looking brown and hardly human. He was strangely clad, and muttered and mumbled like an idiot with inarticulate rage, making signs the while which the sailors could not understand. Yet he led the way to the rivulets of sweetest water, and as he mingled with the men and heard them talking, his long-silent tongue was loosened and he made them understand him. When their casks were filled they took Enoch on board with them, and the tale he told in broken words was at first scarcely credited, but it more and more amazed and melted all who listened to it, and his very looks convinced his hearers of the calamity he had suffered.

They gave him clothes and a free passage home, but he often worked among the rest to shake off his isolation. None of the crew came from his own country or could answer his questions about his home. The voyage was dull,

and they endured long delays, for the vessel was scarcely sea-worthy. But Enoch's fancy fled away week after week before the lazy wind, till one day, like a lover beneath a clouded moon, he drew in through all his blood the morning breath of England. On that same morning the officers and men collected a purse among themselves and gave it to Enoch out of pity for his loneliness. Then they sailed up the coast and landed him in the very harbor whence, so many years ago, he had parted.

Enoch spoke not a word to any one, but started homeward. Home,—what home? had he a home? The afternoon was bright and sunny, but very chill. After a while the fogs began to roll in through the chasms of the hills, and they soon wrapped the landscape in gray. The highway on before him was cut off from Enoch's sight as he trudged forward, and only a narrow breadth of holt or pasturage on either hand was left visible to him. The robin piped disconsolately on the almost naked trees, and the sodden weight of the dead leaves bore them down through the dripping haze. The drizzle grew thicker and the gloom deeper. At last it seemed to Enoch as if a great mist-blotted light flared on him, and he came upon the place he sought.

Then, having stolen down the long street, his

heart foreshadowing some calamity and his eyes on the stones, he reached the house where Annie had lived and loved him, and where his babies, in those far-off happy seven years, were born.

Finding there neither light nor murmur,—a bill of sale showed through the drizzle,—he crept on downward, thinking they were dead, or at least dead to him.

He went down to the pool and narrow wharf, seeking for a tavern which he had known of old. It had had a front of crossed timbers of ancient fashion, and was propped up, and worm-eaten, and ruinous. He thought it must have vanished; but only the landlord had vanished who once kept it, and his widow, Miriam Lane, kept it now with profits that dwindled daily. It was once a haunt of brawling seamen, but now was silent, though it still offered a bed to wayfarers. Here Enoch rested quietly for many days.

But Miriam Lane, the landlady, was good and garrulous, and would not let him be. She often broke in upon his solitary musing, and once she told him, among other annals of the port,—Enoch was so bowed and brown, so utterly broken,—the whole story of his house: his baby's death, Annie's growing poverty, how Philip put her children to school and kept them there,

how he wooed her so long, and how she finally consented, the marriage, and the birth of Philip's child.

No shadow passed over Enoch's countenance, and he did not make a motion. Any one who regarded him well would have thought that he felt the tale less than the teller did; only, when she came to the end,—

"Enoch, poor man, he was cast away and lost."

Then he shook his gray head pathetically and repeated, "Cast away and lost."

Once more, after a pause, he said, in a deeper inward whisper, "Lost."

But he yearned to see Annie's face again.

"If I might only look on her sweet face again and know that she is happy," he murmured to himself.

The thought haunted and harassed him and drove him out and up the hill at evening, when the November day was passing into a duller twilight.

There he sat gazing on all below, and a thousand memories rolled in upon him in unspeakable sadness. By and by the ruddy square of light which streamed from the rear of Philip's house allured him, as the beacon-light will allure a bird of passage till he madly strikes it and beats out his life.

Philip's dwelling fronted on the street, the last house landward. Behind it, with a gate that opened on the waste beyond, flourished a little garden. Within the walled enclosure was an ancient yew-tree, and all around and across ran walks paved with shingle. Enoch avoided the middle walk, and stole up by the wall, behind the yew-tree. There he saw what he might better have shunned, if, indeed, griefs like his ever have any worse or better.

Silver cups sparkled on the burnished board in the reflected glow from the hearth. On the right hand of the fireside he saw Philip, the slighted suitor of the old days, stout and rosy, with his baby across his knees. Over her second father leaned a girl like a later and taller Annie Lee. She was fair-haired and slender, and she tossed a long ribbon with a ring tied to it to tempt the baby, who held up his creasy arms and caught at it, but always missed it, whereat they all laughed gayly. On the left of the fire he saw the mother, who often glanced towards her baby. She turned now and then to speak to her son, who stood beside her, tall and strong, and smiling in response to what she said to him.

When the dead man come to life saw his wife, who was no longer his wife, and saw the baby that was hers but not his on the father's knee;

when he saw all the warmth, the peace, and the happiness, and his own children, tall and beautiful, and Philip reigning there in his place, lord of his rights as well as of his children's love, then, though Miriam Lane had told him all beforehand, he staggered and shook, caught at the yew-tree branch, striving with all his will to hold back the terrible cry he longed to utter. He knew that one word would have shattered all the happiness about that hearth like a blast of doom.

Softly he turned away, therefore, like a thief, to prevent the loose shingle from grating under his feet. He felt all along the garden wall, fearing he might swoon and tumble and be found there insensible. He crept to the gate, and opened it and closed it as lightly as he would have done the chamber door of a sick man. Then he came out on the waste.

He would have knelt there, but his knees were feeble, and he fell prone and dug his fingers into the wet earth and prayed.

"Why, why did they take me away! Oh, too hard to bear! O God Almighty, blessed Saviour, thou that didst uphold me on my lonely island, Father, uphold me here in my loneliness a little longer. Aid me, give me strength not to tell her, never, never to let her know. Help me not to break in upon her peace. My children

too! They know me not,—must I not speak to these? Never! I should betray myself. No father's kiss for me,—the girl so like her mother, and the boy, my son, my son!"

Speech and thought failed him a little while, and he lay as if in a trance. But when he rose, by and by, and paced back towards his solitary home again, all down the long, narrow street he beat the burden out on his weary brain,—

"Not to tell her, never to let her know."

He was not entirely unhappy. His resolve bore him up. His faith was firm, and prayer came from a living source within, like a fountain of sweet water through the salt, keeping him a living soul.

"This miller's wife you spoke about," he said to Miriam, "has she no longer any fear that her first husband may be alive?"

"Ay, ay, poor soul," said Miriam, "she has fear enough. If you could tell her that you had seen him dead it would be a great comfort to her."

"After the Lord has called me," thought Enoch within himself, "she shall know. I will wait His time, but she shall know."

He set himself to get work to live by. He could turn his hand to almost anything. He was a cooper and carpenter, wove fishing-nets,

or helped at loading and unloading the ships which brought the scanty commerce of that day. He thus earned a poor living sufficient for himself; but as he did not care for himself, he worked without hope, and there was little life in his labor. As the year rolled round and the day when he had returned came again, a languor overtook him, a kind of gentle sickness which gradually weakened him, till he could no longer work. He was obliged to keep in-doors first, then he was confined to his chair, and lastly to bed. He bore his sickness very cheerfully, for not more gladly does the wrecked sailor see the boat approach that bears him the hope of life than Enoch saw death dawning on him, the close of all his troubles.

There was one gleam of kindly hope through the darkness. He thought, "After I am gone she will learn how I loved her to the very last."

One day he called for Miriam Lane. "Good woman," he said, "I have a secret; but you must swear, swear on the book, not to reveal it till I am dead."

"Dead," she clamored. "Hear him talk! I warrant, man, we'll bring you round soon enough."

"Swear on the book," repeated Enoch, sternly.

So Miriam, a little frightened by his voice and look, swore as he desired.

Then Enoch turned his gray eyes full on her. "Did you know Enoch Arden of this town?" he asked.

"Know him?" she said. "I knew him slightly. I mind him coming down the street. Held his head high and cared for no man."

Enoch answered slowly and sadly: "His head is low now, and no man cares for him. I think I have scarce three days more to live, and I am the man."

Miriam gave a half-incredulous, half-hysterical cry: "You, Arden, you! No; sure he was a foot higher than you be."

"God has bowed me down to what I am now," said Enoch. "My grief and solitude have broken me. Nevertheless I am he who married—but her name has been changed twice—I married her who married Philip Ray. Sit down now, and listen."

Then he told her of his voyage and the wreck, his lonely life, his coming back and seeing Annie, his resolve, and how he had kept it.

As she listened her tears flowed fast, while she yearned in her heart to rush out and tell the whole village about Enoch Arden and his woes. But she was awed by the man, and bound

by oath to keep silence, and she forbore to betray him.

"See your bairns once before you go. Eh, now, let me fetch 'em, Arden," was all she said; and she rose, eager to bring them down, for he seemed to hang half consentingly for a moment on her words.

But his will conquered in the end. "Woman," he said, "do not disturb me now at the last. Let me hold to my purpose. Sit down again, mark me well, and understand while I have the power to speak. I charge you now when you see her, tell her I died blessing her, praying for her, loving her; save for the bar between us, loving her as when she first laid her head beside my own. And tell my daughter Annie, whom I saw, so like her mother, that my latest breath was spent in blessing and praying for her. Tell my son that I died blessing him. Say to Philip that I blest him too. He never meant anything but good to us. And if my children, who hardly knew me when living, care to see me dead, let them come; I am their father. But she must not come, for my dead face would disturb her after life. There is only one of all my blood who will embrace me in the world-to-be. This is his hair. She cut it off and gave it to me, and I have borne it about all these years, and thought to bear it to the grave with me. But

my mind is changed, for I shall see my babe in bliss. When I am gone, therefore, take this to her. It may comfort her. It will be a token to her that I am he she lost."

He ceased, and the landlady made a voluble answer, promising all he asked. Once more he rolled his eyes on her repeating his request, and once more she promised.

The third night after this, while Enoch slept pale and still and Miriam was watching and dozing at intervals, there came such a loud roar from the sea that all the houses in the village rang with it.

Enoch awoke and rose up. He spread his arms wide, and cried in a loud voice,—

"A sail! a sail! I am saved!" Then he fell back and spoke no more.

Thus the strong and heroic soul of Enoch Arden passed away; and when he was buried, the little port had seldom seen a more costly funeral.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

ROBERT BROWNING.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

I.

GERARD, the warrener, sat apart at the deserted table in the lodge of Lord Tresham's park, while all the rest of his Lordship's retainers crowded to the window which looked out towards the entrance of the mansion. Gerard's back was turned to the table, which was filled with emptied flagons and other evidences of holiday revelling, and in his face was a brooding look which contrasted strongly with the gayety pictured in the countenances of his fellow-servants.

It was a notable day in the annals of Lord Tresham's household, for his great neighbor, the young Earl Mertoun, was coming to offer his heart, his lands, and his noble name to Lady Mildred Tresham, sister of my Lord. Though the estates adjoined each other, there had seldom, until now, been much intercourse between the families, peers as they were in wealth and station. The offered alliance was a very acceptable one to Lord Tresham, who was the guardian of his

sister; but he had not seen the young Earl, and until he had done so he could come to no decision about his offer of marriage. The visit was to be a formal one. The lady's consent had not been obtained, nor had any other preliminaries been arranged.

Old Gerard was unusually morose and quiet that day. He was one of the oldest retainers of the Tresham family, and was looked upon as a leader in the servants' hall. He was allowed unusual liberties by my Lord in recognition of his faithful service, and he was an oracle upon all that related to the family history.

The throng of men at the lodge window looked eagerly down the avenue which led to the mansion gates, expecting the approach of the Earl and his party, while out on the lawn in front were numerous other functionaries of the Tresham household, who were to do honor to the guests when they arrived. Old Richard, the butler, was there, white staff in hand, beribboned, and ruddy of face, and not a little awkward in his unusual array. Beside and about him was a troop of varlets in silk and silver, who were constantly moving from place to place with the restlessness of a waiting crowd.

Every now and then an expectant movement would run through the group outside and pass on to the group at the window. Then Philip,

the cook, who stood tiptoe on the window-seat, would reach eagerly forward, beckoning the while to old Gerard and urging him to come up and have a look at the Earl.

Gerard sat stolidly with his back to the table and fronting those at the window. His head was bent a little forward, as if he did not care to see the faces about him, and his hands were on his knees in a tight grip.

"Here's a place yet, Gerard," called the cook. "Come up; they are near now."

"Save your courtesies, my friend," growled the old man. "Here's my place, and here I mean to stay."

Then one and another fell to jeering him; but he gave them sullen answers which a little cowed them, and the laugh at his expense passed into an uneasy titter.

At last the Earl's retinue actually arrived, and the men in the lodge went fairly wild over it. They feared, each one, that in some respect—the groom, in the matter of horses; the falconer, in the matter of hawks—the Earl's equipment might surpass their own. When the Earl got down, there was a buzz of admiration at his youthful beauty, his blue eyes, and his lithe and manly figure. But next came forth Lord Tresham, and the Earl sank into nothingness in the esteem of his servants beside him. Old

Richard was half cursed for his awkwardness, and a knave behind him was besought in a frantic whisper to prick him upright, so much lower he bent than the Earl's retainer. The horses too were scanned and found full of defects; and when Gerard feigned to take part with the Earl's men, he was jeered at by a dozen voices as a crab and a churl.

When all the new-comers were alighted, the company, led by Lord Tresham and the Earl, moved off towards the entrance of the mansion and paced slowly into the great saloon. After the last retainer had disappeared through the door, those in the lodge jumped down from the window and gathered about the table where Gerard was seated. They filled up the flagons and drained a stout health to Lord Tresham and his house.

"God bless Lord Tresham, Lady Mildred, and the Earl," added the cook.

"Here, Gerard, reach your beaker."

But Gerard kept his hands on his knees, and did not raise his head.

"Drink, boys," he said. "Don't mind me. All's not right with me to-day. Drink without me."

"He's vexed that he let the sight pass without looking," said a yeoman. "Remember, Gerard," he continued in a louder voice, "the Earl comes back this way. You can see him then."

"This way?" asked Gerard, pointing to the window, and raising his hand and face for the first time, a toil-worn hand and a bronzed and wrinkled face.

"Just so," said the other. "This way."

"Then my way's here," said Gerard. And he rose and stalked out of the lodge.

"Old Gerard will die soon, mark my word," said the same yeoman. "Why, it used to be he'd be the foremost man on an occasion not a quarter as important as this. He knows more about heraldry than a king-at-arms. But see his humor now. Die he will, mark me."

"God help him," said the cook. "But who's for the great servants' hall? It joins the saloon, and we can hear what's going on inside."

There was a chorus of approval; and then, after draining each a pot of ale to the honor of the house, the revellers ran across the lawn and flocked laughing into the servants' hall.

II.

When the Earl arrived, amid a group of his retainers, all in gala attire and handsomely mounted, Lord Tresham came forth, through the open ranks of his own servants, and welcomed him as he descended from his chariot. It was a noble meeting, full of fine courtesy,

and like a fair picture in its wealth of gay color and flashing harness. The old mansion of the Treshams served as a dim and stately background, and the ancient trees of the estate spread above the heads of the master and his guest in a sheltering canopy of green.

When the Earl had been duly welcomed by my Lord, old Richard bowed low before them, and led the way with decrepit dignity, wielding his white staff before him, and shaking all his ribbons and rosettes, into the great saloon, where Lord Tresham's brother and Lady Gwendolen, his cousin, with a number of the upper servants and dependants, were clustered to meet the Earl.

The company paced down the length of the long wainscoted hall and stopped at the end. Lord Tresham walked with his guest, pointing out to him the ancestral portraits on either hand, until at last they arrived in front of Austin and Lady Gwendolen. Here the march stopped, and the crowd of followers of both houses broke into groups about the dimly-lighted old hall which had echoed to the voices of generations of noble Treshams.

"This, my Lord," said Lord Tresham, "is my cousin, the Lady Gwendolen."

The Earl bent low and touched his lips upon the lady's hand. She was tall and dark, and

her black eyes looked searchingly at the young man as he greeted her.

Lord Tresham turned towards Austin.

"And this," he said, "is my brother Austin. He is the King's—and Gwendolen's."

The Earl bowed to Austin Tresham, looking askance the while at Gwendolen.

"You have made a noble conquest in winning this gallant soldier, lady," he said.

Lady Gwendolen cast down her eyes: "And you, my Lord, we welcome you, and give you God-speed in your own quest."

"That do we all," said Lord Tresham, taking the Earl's hand in both his own, and speaking with his friendly eyes as well as his voice. "Your noble name would win you a welcome anywhere, but it is yourself we welcome here."

"Thanks, thanks," said the Earl, with a deprecating movement.

"But add to that," went on Lord Tresham, "you come to us with a fair proposal to bring our houses into closer union. Believe me, we are all yours,—Austin, Gwendolen, all my people." And his lordship waved his hand towards the admiring groups who watched this cordial meeting between the two oldest houses in the province.

"I thank you, my Lord," began the Earl, "less for the praise—though I take it to my heart—

than for your implied indulgence towards the object of my visit. I may ask, then, may I, for the gift I have come to seek? I love your sister, Lord Tresham, and as truly as you would have one love her,—even more—more than you can believe. All the world values me for is yours if you will give me, my true self, without a title or a rood of land, that lady. Tell me, in one word, is it death or life?"

Lady Gwendolen switched her fan lightly to her face and leaned towards Austin.

"Now, there's loving, Austin," she whispered.

"Oh, he's so young," breathed Austin in half a laugh.

"Young? Old enough, I'll wager, to know he would never have gained an entrance here if all this fear and trembling had been needed."

"Hush!" cautioned Austin. "See how he blushes."

"Well, that must be true love indeed," answered the lady. "Ours must begin over again."

Lord Tresham and his guest had taken seats during this whispered colloquy, and now Austin and Lady Gwendolen also sat down in an alcove near an open casement which looked out upon the sunlit lawn under the oak boughs. They were within ear-shot of the Earl and Tresham, and lost no word of what they said.

His Lordship told the young Earl that he was fully satisfied with his advances and more than satisfied with himself, but that the Lady Mildred's hand was her own to give or to withhold. He said he would encourage the suit with all his heart provided the lady herself found the suitor acceptable.

"By the way," he asked, with a quick turn of the head towards the Earl, "have you ever seen the Lady Mildred?"

Earl Mertoun seemed a little confused by the abrupt question: "I—I—that is, my Lord, our estates join, you remember, and sometimes I have carelessly wandered across the border after wounded game. Then—once or twice—I have come unawares upon the lady's wondrous beauty—and—I have seen her then."

There was a quick sparkle in Lady Gwendolen's black eyes. Whether it was half of distrust or not, it was a penetrating look, and even while she hid her lips with her fan her eyes were riveted sidewise upon the Earl.

"Notice how he falters, Austin, that when a lady passed he, having eyes, saw her! If it had been you, you would have said, 'Yes, I saw her on such a day and scanned her from head to foot; there was something red at her elbow which ought not to have been there; but, on the whole, I was well enough pleased.' Now,

Austin, after this no more of such lukewarm wooing."

The two laughed quietly together, and Lord Tresham went on with his talk. He told the Earl how his sister had never had a mother's care. He himself, he said, stood for her father; and then he praised all her gentle and sweet traits as a brother should whose sister was as fair as the Lady Mildred.

The Earl thanked him warmly for his counsel; but his Lordship continued:

"And yet I have never attempted to control Mildred. Her wish to please me quite outstrips my desire to be pleased. But my heart will prefer your suit to her as if it were its own. Can I say more than that, my Lord?"

"Indeed, no more; thanks, a thousand thanks," replied the Earl, and he craved pardon if sometimes his mind seemed to wander from their discourse, because, as he said, he was conscious that he was in her very home, under the selfsame roof. Then he rose to take his leave, and Lord Tresham bade him adieu, assuring him that as soon as the lady had made known her wishes a messenger would be despatched to him with the news.

The Earl made a courtly bow to Lady Gwendolen and to Austin, then turned and passed on to the door with Lord Tresham.

When his Lordship came back after parting with his guest he was radiant with enthusiasm.

"Come," he cried to Austin and Lady Gwendolen, "what do you think of him? how does he seem?"

"He's young," said the lady.

"Well, and what is she?—only an infant, except in heart and brain. Why, she's only fourteen. And you?" Then turning with a laugh to his brother and pointing to Gwendolen, "How old is she, Austin?"

"Now, there's tact for you," mockingly replied the lady. "I meant that being young was a good excuse for lack of wit."

"He lack wit!" said his Lordship. "Wherein now did he lack wit?"

Lady Gwendolen spoke frankly and from a mind not easily deceived. She conceived her intuitions to be as wise as her cousin's judgment. She imitated the Earl standing as stiff as the steward's rod and making tiresome harangues; instead, as she said, with a mock-angry toss of the head, of slipping over to her side and pleading his cause in her ear.

"You are right, cousin," said Tresham. "You will help us all. You are—just what Austin can best tell. Come up, all three, for she is in the library, no doubt,—the day's fast wearing."

Lady Gwendolen did not move. As his Lord-

ship and Austin stepped towards the door, she called, "Austin, now we must——"

"Must what?" asked Tresham. "Must speak truth, you malignant tongue! If you detect a single fault in him I'll challenge you!"

"Witchcraft's a fault in him, for he has bewitched you," laughed Gwendolen.

Then his Lordship fell into more serious talk. He urged that Mildred should be induced to see the Earl as soon as possible,—say to-morrow, or next day at farthest.

The Lady Gwendolen playfully refused to be instructed, but affected to be softened somewhat at his Lordship's offer to give her his favorite hunter, Urganda, as a reward for securing Mildred's consent to see the Earl the next day.

This compact duly entered into, they left the hall and went directly to the library in search of Lady Mildred.

III.

Some hours after, Lord Tresham and his brother having parted from them in the library, the ladies ascended the narrow stone flight to Lady Mildred's bower. It was a shadowy, wainscoted room, looking out on the park through painted windows, which when the sun shone

against them through the great yew boughs, cast tinted patterns on the floor.

But it was nearly midnight now, and the moon struggled feebly with the light of the candles on Lady Mildred's table. She and her cousin were seated beside each other in their glow, Gwendolen having taken a low stool at Mildred's feet, from which she looked up coaxingly into her face with her arms resting on Mildred's knee. Mildred was languid and inattentive, and Gwendolen, abandoning her raillery, fell a little into chiding her.

"Don't think, cousin," she said, "that I've worked such prodigies in sparing you from Lord Mertoun's pedigree and in defending Austin's attack on the beauty of his eyes, only to come up here and be coolly dismissed."

"Gwendolen!" said Mildred, "what have I done—what could suggest such a thing?"

"There, there!" soothingly, "I know you want to be alone, dear, yet——"

"And did my brother really receive him well?" interrupted Mildred.

"If I said 'well' I only half expressed it. But which brother, Mildred?"

"Why, Thorold, of course; who else?" And then, as if heedless of her question, she looked furtively about her. "But, dear Gwendolen, see, it is getting late. When the moon reaches that

purple pane I know it is midnight." She pointed with more animation than she had yet shown to a pane in the casement opposite to her.

"Well," said Gwendolen, yawning, "that Thorold should find no flaw in any one who came to engraft himself on his peerless stock,—that quite astonishes me!"

"But who finds a flaw in Mertoun?" asked Mildred, turning suddenly from watching the moon.

"Not your brother, and therefore not the whole world," mocked Gwendolen.

"Oh, I'm so weary, Gwendolen!" sighed Mildred. "Bear with me, dearest."

"How foolish I am!" exclaimed Gwendolen, rising.

"Oh, no, so kind; indeed, very kind," said Mildred, reaching her arms up to her for a caress. "But I am so weary. I must rest."

"Good-night, and good rest to you, then," called Gwendolen, as she tripped towards the door. But her gay humor got the better of her before she lifted the latch, and she cried, "I told you, his mantle lay most gracefully under his rings of light hair?"

"Brown hair," said Mildred, without turning her head, and half forgetful that she spoke at all.

"Brown? Why, it *is* brown," said Gwendolen, with a step towards her. "How could you know that?"

"How?" asked Mildred, awakening to the real purport of her answer. "Did you not—— Oh, no, it was Austin declared his hair was light, not brown. My head!" And she raised her hands to her temples; then, seeing the moon again, "And look, the moon has reached the purple pane. Good-night, sweet cousin."

"Forgive me, dearest," cried Gwendolen, wafting her a kiss, "and sleep all the sounder for me!" But before she had quite closed the door behind her she flung it open again and leaned into the room, crying, "Perdition! Thorold finds that the Earl's greatest of all grandmothers was grander daughter to the fair dame whose garter slipped down at the famous dance!" Then the door clicked to and she was gone.

Mildred hurriedly rose and went on tiptoe over to the door to see if her cousin had really left. When she was satisfied of this, she lifted the small lamp which was suspended before the Virgin's image in the window and placed it in front of the purple pane, then returned to her seat.

As she sat there, musing, with her eyes on the moon, but with a suggestion of expectancy in her alert attitude, there was a noise of rus-

tling leaves outside too loud and irregular to have been caused by the wind. Then a low voice, passionately sweet, and with a man's rich accents, began to sing:

"There's a woman like a dew-drop, she's so purer than the purest;
And her noble heart's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith's the surest:
And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth of lustre
Hid i' the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the wild-grape cluster,
Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted marble:
Then her voice's music,—call it the well's bubbling, the bird's warble!"

As he reached these words the singer stepped from the boughs, where he had clung to offer his serenade, on to the casement ledge, and then lightly into the room. His figure was wrapped in a long mantle, and he approached Lady Mildred's seat and bent his head, still singing, but in a softer and tenderer voice, down to her upturned lips. When he had finished his song he threw off his cloak and slouched hat, and stood revealed to her.

"My very heart sings, so my lips sing, too, dearest," he said, taking her hand.

She drew it away and asked him to sit by

her side. He took the stool left by Lady Gwendolen, and claimed her hand again, as his own, he said. She did not withdraw it now, but looked down lovingly into his eyes.

"Well," he exclaimed, shifting his attitude, "the meeting we dreaded so much is ended at last."

"And what begins now?" asked Mildred, pensively.

"Happiness!" said he, turning again to look fondly in her face. "Happiness such as few on this earth can know!" he repeated.

"Ah, Henry," she said, "so it might be if we deserved it. But my soul has heard a death-knell. It can never be."

"Listen, Mildred," he broke out passionately. "Have I met your brother face to face? have I gained him at last? does a new light begin to break on the long unrest of our night, and still do you see no glory in the east? When I am by you, dear, to be always by you, after I have won and may openly worship you, can you still say, This can never be?"

Mildred let her hand fall gently on his brow. She looked long and fondly into his eyes, then she shook her head, and glanced up musingly at the moonlight as it streamed through the purple pane.

"Sin has surprised us, Henry, and so will punishment," she said.

"No, no, me alone, who alone have sinned," he said in a deep whisper.

"And has our life been storm throughout to you, Henry," she asked, "that you liken it to a night of strange unrest?"

"Your life, yours, Mildred, I meant. What am I that I should waste a thought on myself when you are by me? No, no, it has been a perpetual dawn with me. It was you I pulled the night down on!"

"Come what come will," she said, softly, "we have been happy, Henry." And she reached her hand into his.

He took it and sat with fixed eyes, as if living over again in thought the life they had led together. Then suddenly turning to her, he said, abruptly, "How good your brother is! I thought he was a cold and haughty man."

"They told me everything," she said, as if anticipating his thought. "I know all."

"Yes, it will soon be over now." And he pressed her hand to his lips.

But, as if his words were a spark among her ashen thoughts, she glowed for a moment with a new warmth.

"Over!" she exclaimed. "What over? What must I live through before I can say it is over? Is our meeting before them over? Have I received the partner of my guilty love in their

presence with a brow that tries to appear a maidenly one, with lips that try to make believe that, when they reply to you, it is the nearest they have ever approached a stranger's? Some prodigy sent by God will put a stop to this deliberate piece of wickedness. I shall murmur no smooth speeches, but pour forth our whole woful story in a sudden frenzy,—the love, the shame, and the despair! Oh, Henry, you do not wish me to draw this vengeance down on us? How can I affect a grace that is gone from me, gone once, and forever?"

He soothed her as best he could with speech and caress, and offered to break the morning's contract with her brother and part from her, leaving their love to the care of healing time.

His manly and persuasive tone brought her to herself again, and once more she said, softly but firmly, that she would meet them,—go through the ordeal and do all as it was planned.

"But when?" he urged,—"to-morrow? Yes, say to-morrow, dearest, and let us be done with it!"

She took fright again at his hurry, and asked him to delay till the day after.

"I shall never be able to prepare my words and looks and gestures sooner than that," she pleaded. "But how you must despise me, Henry!"

He took her gently around the waist and raised her from her seat, then paced the room back and forth with her several times, as if to render more deliberate what he meant to utter.

"Mildred," he said, at last, "break my heart if you will; but answer me, where do you see contempt,—you did say contempt, didn't you? —where do you see contempt for you in me? I would pluck it off and cast it out of me! But you'll not repeat that, Mildred, will you?"

"Dear Henry," she murmured.

Then, as if to justify what he had so fervently said, he repeated the story of their love: how he was scarce a boy when they met, and she almost an infant with her hair falling loose on either side her face; how his cheeks had reddened to find her such a sweet fulfilment of all his boyish dreams; how he had revealed his passion to her and sworn her to secrecy; how at last he grew mad with love, and felt that he must see his beauty in her own bower or perish in the undertaking. When he had finished this passionate retrospect he poured out all the old adoration, which had never waned but had grown as they grew in years. She listened with eyes looking far away and half-parted lips. She was living over again the raptures of their early days together. Then, still with wide, thoughtful eyes, she spoke:

"I scarcely grieve for the past. We'll love on, Henry,—you will love me still?"

"Who could ever love less what he has injured?" he broke out vehemently. He touched her lips as if to seal the vow to shield her through all that might come.

"There," she said, gently forcing him away from her. "Let that be your last word. Go now. I shall sleep to-night."

He asked eagerly, as if startled by her words, whether they were to meet no more.

"One night more, Henry," she said.

"And then,—think, then!" he cried.

She made a sad answer to his enthusiasm. There was no sweet courtship for her, no dawning consciousness of love, no innocent hopes and fears,—the morning was over.

"But you are cautious, dear?" she said, as he prepared to leave. "You are sure no one sees you scale the walls?"

"Oh, trust me!" he answered, in careless confidence. "Our last meeting's fixed, then? To-morrow night?"

He snatched a single passionate kiss and was gone before she could waft him a farewell. He climbed across into the yew-tree boughs and descended to the ground. She could see his form glance through the moonlight as he ran up the avenue of old, knotted trunks.

He turned once and waved an adieu to the window where he knew she was standing, and she responded to it, though she was conscious he could not see her.

"I must believe him, believe every word," she murmured to herself, as she passed back into the room. "I was so young—I loved him so—I had no mother—God forgot me."

Then she put out the candles, and in the flood of pallid moonlight that slanted across the room paced silently to and fro with many an anxious thought to bow her fair head.

IV.

When Lord Tresham entered the library the next morning after the Earl's visit he brought Gerard, the warrener, with him. He bade him come quickly in, and when the old man had done so, with an awkward gait unused to such luxurious places, his Lordship hastened to lock the door. Then my Lord drew himself up and looked keenly at his aged retainer, faithful servant of the house through two generations.

"Now repeat firmly and circumstantially what you told me," said he, his face wearing a look half doubtful of Gerard's tale, yet not a little alarmed.

"It is God's truth," began Gerard; "night after night——"

"Since when?" interrupted his Lordship.

"At least a month—every midnight some man has access to Lady Mildred's chamber."

"Tush, 'access'!" broke in Lord Tresham. "No wide words like 'access' to me!"

"He runs along the woodside," continued Gerard, with a meek bow of obedience, "crosses to the south, takes the tree on the left at the end of the avenue——"

"The last great yew-tree?" asked Lord Tresham.

"Yes, my Lord; you can stand on the main boughs as if you were on a platform. Then he——"

"Quick!" exclaimed his Lordship, both hands knit together in an agony of doubt.

"Climbs up," went on the old warrener, stolidly conscious of the pain he was giving, "and where the limbs lessen in size at the top—I cannot see distinctly, but I think he throws a line that reaches over to the lady's casement."

"But he never enters!" said Tresham, appealingly. "No, Gerard, it is some wretched fool prying into her privacy. Sometimes to a youth it seems a precious thing to have even approached the bower of the lady he has set his thoughts upon. Of course he could not enter, Gerard?"

The old man began again as if no interruption had occurred:

"There is a lamp that's set in the midst of the casement, under a red square in the painted glass of Lady Mildred's——"

"Leave the name out!" said his Lordship, impatiently. "Well, the lamp?"

"It is moved up higher at midnight," replied Gerard, "to a small dark-blue pane. He waits for that among the boughs. At sight of it—plain as I see you now, my Lord—he opens the lady's casement and enters."

"And stays?" asked Lord Tresham, with a step forward and looking keenly into Gerard's face.

"An hour, perhaps two hours."

"And you saw this once? twice? Be quick, answer!"

"Twenty times," said Gerard, with eyes always on the ground.

"And what brings you under the yew-trees at that hour?" asked his Lordship, trying to throw doubt on the old man's story as a means of allaying his own pain. But Gerard had an honest answer. It was a hard duty he was performing, and he was unconscious of every other thought.

"I left my range one night to track a strange stag that broke through our pale, and then I first saw the man."

"But you had your cross-bow, why not have

sent a shaft through him?" asked Lord Tresham, fiercely.

"It was bright moonlight,—bright as day, and he came from Lady Mildred's chamber."

His Lordship seemed not to heed the words. He stood pondering a long time. His head was turned towards the window, but his thoughts were not upon what he saw. A score of explanations of the strange news were passing through his mind. At last, abruptly, he turned to Gerard, who had never moved, but stood hat in hand with his eyes bent upon the floor.

"You have no cause, Gerard,—who could have cause,—to do my sister a wrong?"

"Oh, my Lord," broke out the old warrener, as if he could no longer keep his feelings in check, "let me speak my mind this once. Since I have known it I have lived as if I were plucked hither and thither in a fiery net. There was fire if I turned to her, fire if I turned to you, and fire if I flung myself down and tried to die. Why, she could not have been seven years old when I was first trusted to conduct her safe through the deer-park to stroke the snow-white fawn, which within a month I taught to eat bread from her tiny hand. She always greeted me with a smile—she—— Oh, if I could undo what's done!—I mean I could not speak and bring her a hurt for conscience' sake; but yet

when I was forced to hold my peace, every morsel I ate beneath your roof, my own birthplace, choked me. This morning it seemed that either I must confess to you or die. Now it is done, I seem the vilest worm that crawls!" He stopped with a sob in his throat and took his handkerchief from his hat, mopping his brow and eyes with it.

"No, no, Gerard," said Lord Tresham, soothingly, and putting his hand on the old man's arm.

But Gerard retreated from his touch. "Let me go!" he said.

Lord Tresham did not heed him. His mind was fixed on what he had heard.

"A man, you say, Gerard? What man? Young? Not a low hind? How was he dressed?" He asked the questions rapidly without waiting for replies.

"A slouched hat and a large dark foreign cloak," said Gerard, answering only the last. "His face is hid, but I judge him to be young; no hind, be sure, my Lord."

"Why?" asked his Lordship,

"Because he is always armed. His sword shows beneath his cloak."

"Gerard," said Lord Tresham, as he dismissed him, "it is needless for me to say that you must not breathe a word of this."

"Thanks, thanks, my Lord!" exclaimed the

old man, bowed down with grief and scarcely knowing what he uttered. Lord Tresham unlocked the door, and, with a bow, Gerard passed out.

When he was gone, my Lord paced up and down the room with long nervous strides. He was not yet prepared to believe all he had heard, plausible as it sounded. Gerard was old and likely to be mistaken. Moreover, it was not in his sister's nature to do what he had charged. He laughed the suspicion away. That she, the pure, beautiful girl, could err so, much less practise treachery and craft such as she must have used to deceive him,—the thought was preposterous! But yet his heart ached with a dread that he could not conquer, and his head sank between his arms on the table. He had not sat there more than a moment or so when there was a knock at the door, and Lady Gwendolen called,—

"Lord Tresham!"

Then after a pause another knock, and again:

"Is Lord Tresham there?"

He lifted his head at this and looked bewildered towards the door, then hastily rose and pulled down the first book he could reach. When he had opened it on his knees and pretended to be reading he called, "Come in," and Lady Gwendolen entered.

"Ah, Gwendolen," he said,—"good-morning."

"Nothing more?" she asked, archly.

"What more should I say?" he said, with half a smile.

"Pleasant question," she retorted, with mock vexation. "More? This more, then: Did I besiege poor Mildred last night with 'the Earl' till I am fain to hope that—— But, Thorold!" she hurried close to him, "what is all this? You are not well!"

"Who?—I?" he said, in apparent surprise. "No, you are laughing at me."

"Has what I hoped for come to pass, then?" she asked, gayly. "Do you find some blot in the Earl's 'scutcheon in your huge book there?"

"When did you leave Mildred's chamber, Gwendolen?" he asked, abruptly.

"Oh, late enough, I told you. The main thing to tell is, *how* I left her chamber. Content yourself; she'll treat this paragon of Earls to no such ungracious——"

"Send her here," interrupted his Lordship.

"Thorold?" she said, doubtfully.

"I mean—acquaint her, Gwendolen. But mildly!"

"Mildly?" asked Gwendolen, with a look of surprise on her cheerful face.

"Yes," said Lord Tresham. "You guessed right, Gwendolen. I am not well. There's no

hiding it. But tell her I would like to see her at her leisure,—that is, at once,—here in the library. Tell her the passage we hunted for in that old Italian book is found, and if I let it slip again—— You see, Gwendolen, that she must come—and instantly!" His tone grew more and more peremptory as he proceeded, but Lady Gwendolen feigned not to notice it.

"I'll die piecemeal, record that, if some blot in the 'scutcheon has not turned up!" she exclaimed.

"Go!" he said, impatiently; then, changing his mind as she retreated, "Or, Gwendolen, just be at call—you and Austin, if you choose—in the adjoining gallery. There now, go!" And the lady tripped out with a backward glance which showed her astonishment at my Lord's unusual humor.

Tresham felt that he had made but poor success at disguising his agitation, and he was little hopeful that he could question his sister with any better avail. He was of an outspoken and candid nature, and concealment was a new trait for him to assume. He could not master his thoughts now. They would stray away in spite of him to the one theme in his mind,—How could Mildred be guilty? Prove Gerard's charges, and you might prove anything afterwards,—that she

was a poisoner or a traitress. No, the thing was impossible!

As he sat there with bowed head brooding in this fashion, Mildred came into the room.

"What book is it I wanted, Thorold?" she asked. "Gwendolen thought you were pale,—you are not pale." She looked anxiously into his face. "That book?" she said, pointing to the one in his hand. "Why, that's Latin, surely!"

"Mildred," he said, softly and tenderly, "here's a line——" but as she bent over him he moved nervously away, saying, "Don't lean on me." Then he went on: "Here's a line I'll put into English for you: 'Love conquers all things.' What love conquers them, Mildred? what love would you say was the best?"

"True love, Thorold," she answered, looking half alarmed at him.

"No, no," he said; "I mean, whose love is the best of all those who love or profess to love?"

She looked down as if divining his intention, then answered with a little hesitation,—

"The list's so long, Thorold; there's father's, mother's, husband's——"

"Mildred," he said, gravely, "I do believe a brother's love for an only sister exceeds them all. There's no alloy in his love, nothing for which she must feel gratitude. He never gave her life, nor what keeps life, never tended her,

nor instructed, nor enriched her. His love can claim no right over her saving pure love alone. That's what I call freedom from earthliness. I think such love,—apart from yours and mine,—I think—I am sure—a brother's love exceeds all other loves in the world in pure unselfishness."

"But what is this for, Thorold?" she asked, half jestingly and half fearful that it preluded the discovery of her wrong-doing.

"It means this, Mildred," he answered, and he rose as he said the words; but when he looked into her fair, innocent face, all his courage and indignation left him. "No, no," he said, "I cannot come to it so soon! That's one of the many points I left out in my haste. Every day and hour throws its slight film between you and the being who is tied to you by birth, until those slender threads grow to a web that shrouds her whole life from yours. You live so close together yet so far apart. Must I rend this web, Mildred, and break down the sweet mystery that makes a sister sacred? Shall I speak or not?"

"Speak, Thorold," she said, faintly, and with downcast eyes.

"I will, then. Is there a story men could tell of you, Mildred, which you would conceal from me? I cannot think there is falsehood on those lips. Say there is no such story, sister, and I'll believe you."

Mildred did not look at him, nor did she move or say a word. There was a long pause while he stood gazing at her downcast eyes and reaching inwardly the awful conviction of her guilt.

"Not speak?" he cried at last. "Explain, then! Clear it up! Move away some of this miserable weight from my heart. Ah, if I could bring myself to plainly make their charge against you! Must I, Mildred?"

There was another pause, but she did not move nor raise her head. He broke out again: "Is there a gallant who has admittance to your chamber night after night?" He paused once more, but she was silent. "Come, then," he exclaimed, pleadingly; "come, Mildred, if it must be so. Give me his name. Till now I had only thought of you; but now,—his name!"

She could endure it no longer. She raised her head, but looked away from him. She did not weep. She spoke as if her grief was too great for tears.

"Thorold, do what you will with me. I will submit, and bless you for it. But do not, oh! do not plunge me into any other wrong. I cannot tell his name."

"Then judge for yourself," he said, with the first real anger he had shown. "How shall I act?"

"Oh, Thorold, you must not tempt me so!"

The tears had come now and she could look at him again. "Could I die here by your sword it would seem like punishment, and I should glide like an arch-cheat into bliss. But what would become of you?"

"And what will become of me, Mildred?" He threw his hands wide apart and paused for her answer. "I'll hide your shame and mine from the world. You may wed your paramour above our mother's tomb; she cannot move from beneath your feet. We two will somehow wear this out one day. But to-morrow the Earl comes. Last night I despatched a missive at your command bidding him present himself. You encouraged him to come. Now this morning you must dictate another letter to countermand last night's."

"But, Thorold," she said, with a sudden impulse, "what if I will receive him as I said?"

"The Earl!" cried Tresham, horrified.

"Yes, I will receive him; why not?" said Mildred, glad at so easy an issue from the difficulty.

Lord Tresham paced to and fro several times, looking steadily and fearfully at her as if she were some unnatural thing. Then he called loudly,—

"Ho, there! Gwendolen!"

Lady Gwendolen and Austin entered in haste from the outer gallery.

"Look!" said Tresham, pointing at Mildred. "Look there, the woman there!"

"How? Mildred?" said the others in a breath.

"Mildred once," he thundered, "but now the receiver, night after night beneath this roof that covers us all, of an accomplice in her guilt. Know her for what she is! Know her for a wanton!"

Gwendolen had taken Mildred in her arms while he spoke, and clung about her, trying to move her with sympathy and sisterly words.

"Oh, Mildred, Mildred, look at me at least!" she pleaded; then turning to Tresham, "Oh, pity, pity! Thorold, she stands here as if she were turned to stone!"

But Tresham took no notice of the appeal. He walked excitedly up and down repeating fragments of Mildred's story. Gwendolen motioned him to be quiet for Mildred's sake, who looked as if she were frozen with shame and grief.

Mildred saw the gesture, and spoke with her eyes still on the ground: "All he says is true. You had best go away from me now."

She tenderly unwound her cousin's arms from about her.

But Tresham was too deeply stirred to cease because his words gave pain. He meant that they should bite deeply into the conscience of their victim, and he went over and over again

the unhappy details. It was not, he said, because Mildred had fallen from grace that he reproached her so sternly. She was unprotected and without a mother's care; and he too was half to blame for her fault. He had lacked, perhaps, in brotherly attention. What roused all his feelings of repugnance and made him loathe her now was, that she could come from the guilty intercourse with her gallant and wantonly propose that he, her brother, should help her to allure the young and trustful Earl into an alliance with her.

Mildred gave no sign that she listened to his words until he reached the climax of his indignation.

"Shame hunt her from the earth!" he cried, rushing towards the door.

She did not look around at him, but her face grew suddenly pallid, and she fell fainting into Gwendolen's arms.

Austin followed Tresham to the door, but he was recalled by Gwendolen. He also would have deserted his sister; but the truer heart of his betrothed won him back. He came to her side and bent tenderly over the unconscious Mildred.

"Here's Austin, Mildred," whispered Gwendolen. "He says he does not half believe what he has heard. He says, look up and take his hand."

Austin repeated what she said: "Yes, look up and take my hand, dear." And, softened by his soothing voice, the poor girl lifted up her languid hand and laid it on his.

Then as if she were dreaming the words, she said over again, slowly and brokenly, "I was so young. Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had no mother—God forgot me."

She raised herself upon her feet at last and went towards the door with groping hands stretched out before her. They tried to detain her, but she entreated them to let her go.

Gwendolen followed her, and running in front before she reached the door, bade her rely on her two friends, who would do her bidding in all things. "Here's Austin waiting patiently to help you," she said. "There's one spirit to command and one to love. Why, Mildred, the world has been won many a time by just such a beginning as this."

Mildred understood now, and was touched by their devotion. She spoke as if a deep relief had come to her heart.

"I believe if I could once throw my arms about your neck and sink my head on your breast, Gwendolen, that I could weep again."

Gwendolen whispered to Austin to let go Mildred's hand and wait for them in the hall; and he quietly withdrew.

Mildred leaned her head on Gwendolen's shoulder, but she could not weep.

"No more tears from this brain," she murmured; "no sleep, no tears!" Then with a sudden impulse born of her old self she said, "Oh, Gwendolen, how I love you!"

Gwendolen urged her to confide in her, to reveal her lover's name; it was so needful to know his name were anything to be done for her. But she would not tell it.

"At least he *is* your lover? And you love him too?" said Gwendolen.

"Ah, do you ask me that? But I am fallen so low," she answered, piteously.

"You love him still, then?" said Gwendolen.

"My only prop against the guilt that crushes me!"

"But how could you even let us talk of Lord Mertoun?" inquired the puzzled Gwendolen.

Mildred did not answer at once. She seemed struggling with some painful problem. At last she said, wearily, "There is a cloud around me, Gwendolen."

"But you said you would receive his suit in spite of this," urged her cousin.

"I say there is a cloud——" began Mildred; but Gwendolen interrupted.

"No cloud to me!" she exclaimed, a sudden

light breaking in upon her; "Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same."

"What mad fancy!" said Mildred, raising her head and turning full on Gwendolen to see if she really meant it.

Gwendolen called to Austin, but he did not come in; then to Mildred she said, firmly, "Spare your pains. When I have once got a truth I keep it."

"By all your love, sweet cousin," pleaded Mildred, "forbear, forbear!"

Austin did not appear, and Gwendolen called again.

"Oh, not to have guessed it at first!" she cried. "But I did guess it; that is, I divined it,—felt how it was by instinct. How else could I absolve you from all that heap of sins? But, dear, the secret is wholly mine. If the Earl returns to-night——"

"He is lost!" groaned Mildred.

"There, I thought so!" said Gwendolen, and again she called Austin.

Presently he came in.

"Where have you been hiding, Austin?" she said. He did not notice her agitation. He thought solely of his brother.

"Thorold has gone across the meadow-lands," said he. "I watched him till I lost him in the skirts of the beech-wood."

"Gone! Everything is against us!" cried Gwendolen. "But first we must help Mildred to her room. You go on the other side, Austin." They supported her up the stone flights to the chamber where the painted window looked out upon the yew-tree avenue.

V.

THERE was a glimmer of light shining through a pane in Lady Mildred's casement, but no other token of life was visible in that room high up among the yew-tree boughs. Down on the path below a man was pacing restlessly back and forth. It was nearly midnight, and he muttered to himself as if he were vexed or distressed. Now and then, as he paced near, he looked up at the slender ray of light, and at last, as it fell faintly on his face, it revealed Lord Tresham.

He had wandered far away over the heath and through the woods after he had left the library. He longed to forget himself and his despair in the paths which had once bewildered him as a boy. Yet he was inevitably led back to the one place he wished to avoid. The darkest shade in the trees broke up, and the old trunks seemed to open wide to let him go out; the river, too, seemed to put its arm about him and conduct him to the detested spot. There was no use for him to strive against his

fate. He let the trees and the river do as they would with him. But when he had reached the avenue of yews and entered its dark reaches, he could not tell why he had come there nor what he must do.

A bell struck midnight while he was still pacing restlessly about, and he seemed to gather a definite purpose from its sound. As his hand reached instinctively for the sword-hilt, there was a noise behind him of approaching steps. He hid behind a huge trunk and watched, while a tall figure, muffled in a long cloak, stole past.

It was Mertoun come for his final meeting with Mildred. He stood at the foot of the great tree with his face upturned to the casement, waiting for the signal. He was buoyant with hope. This was the last time he would ever watch for the rise of his love-star to the purple pane. The past was to be made precious by the happiness of the present. He longed to see Mildred revive and cast away all evidence of their long concealment.

As he was musing thus, the light was lifted slowly to the purple pane, and with a passionate exclamation he prepared to ascend the old tree; but before his feet had quite left the ground Tresham grasped his arm.

"Let me go,—peasant, by your grasp!" he said, in a menacing whisper. Then, alarmed by the

man's persistence. "Nay, here's gold; it was a mad freak of mine. I said I'd pluck a branch from that white-blossoming shrub near the casement up there. Here, take this and hold your peace." He offered a purse, but the grim intruder made no motion to take it.

"Come into the moonlight yonder with me." The stranger spoke sternly and firmly.

"But, fool, I'm armed," said Mertoun.

"Yes or no,—you'll come into the light or no?" Tresham's hand was on his throat, and there was no escape. As they advanced, the Earl wondered where he had heard that voice before. It sounded so like one he remembered, but that was mild and slow.

"You are armed," Tresham said; "that's well. Your name, now,—who are you?"

The Earl now recognized his captor, and his heart gave a great bound of fear for Mildred. He said nothing, and Tresham uttered a scornful exclamation.

"Your name?" he asked again, sharply.

Mertoun implored him not to desire to know his name; but his plea was in vain. He threw off his disguises and stood revealed in the moonlight.

"Mertoun!"

Lord Tresham fell back as though stunned. But he paused only a moment. "Draw now!" he said, fiercely.

"Hear me first," urged the Earl.

"Not one word! I will strangle in your throat the least word that informs me how you can live and still be what you are. I know now it was you who taught her to sin and keep that innocent face. Draw!" He repeated his challenge sternly.

"I do not ask it for my own sake? For hers —for yours!" the Earl implored.

"How should I know your cowardly ways!" said Tresham, with a cruel laugh. "Tell me what will force you to fight. Must I sting you with a blow?" And he taunted him with base names and insulting threats.

The Earl drew his sword, calling on Heaven to judge between them.

"Have your will, my Lord," he said at last, falling into the attitude of defence.

There were but a few passes between them, and Mertoun fell.

Tresham bent over him.

"You are not hurt?" he asked, anxiously.

"You will hear me now." The Earl spoke as if in pain but with calm assurance.

Lord Tresham bade him rise, and would have helped him; but he was desperately hurt.

"Ah, Tresham," he said, "what gives a man a more sacred right to speak in his own defence than the thought that presently he may have leave to speak before his God?"

Tresham grew alarmed. His anger had cooled, and the impulsive wrong he had done began to touch him with remorse.

"Not hurt?" he went on, oblivious of the Earl's words. "It cannot be! You made no effort to resist me." He put his hand upon Mertoun's side. "Hurt here?" he asked.

Mertoun half groaned as he touched him. Then he pleaded with Tresham to hear him and believe him. He told of the early wrong he had done his house, and said if he could forgive him he would hope to speak of Mildred. Lord Tresham not only forgave him, but in the fulness of his regret for what had happened craved himself to be forgiven.

"Ah, Tresham, that a sword-stroke and a drop of blood or two should have brought about all this!" The Earl spoke brokenly but with a deep happiness. "Why, it was my fear of you, my love of you, that ruined me. I burned to knit myself to you; but I was young, and your surpassing reputation kept me aloof. And yet I know you did not see this. Let me look into your face now; I feel it is changed." He tried to lift himself, but could not see. "Where, where are you, Tresham?" he asked; but the lamp at the window caught his eye as he strove to rise, and he wailed her name. "What will Mildred do, Tresham? Her life is bound up in

the life that is bleeding away. I must live. There! If you will only turn me I shall live and save her! Oh, had you but heard! Had you but heard me! What right had you to set a thoughtless foot on our lives and then say as we perish, 'If I had thought all would have gone well'? We've sinned and we die. Never you sin, Lord Tresham, for you'll die, and God will judge you."

Tresham murmured some soothing words, but he could not stem the tide of the dying man's utterance.

"Now say this to her," continued the Earl. "You—no one but you—say, I saw him die, and he breathed this: 'I love her.'—You don't know what those three small words mean, Tresham.—Say loving her lowers me down the bloody slope to death with memories—— I speak to her, not you, who had no pity."

Then he broke forth into a passionate appeal against those who might misuse her after he was gone. He entreated her to die with him, and leave a world which had cast them out.

His burning words were cut short by the sharp sound of a whistle near by.

"Ho, Gerard!" called Lord Tresham. And the old warrener, with Austin and Gwendolen, came hurriedly through the trees, carrying lights in their hands.

"No one speak!" commanded Tresham. "You see what is done! I cannot bear another voice."

"There's light, light all around me, and I move towards it. Tresham, you have promised?" said the dying Earl.

"I will bear those words to her," answered Tresham, slowly and tenderly.

"Now?" he asked.

"Now!" said Tresham. He beckoned to Gerard: "Lift the body, Gerard, and leave me the head."

Mertoun gave a sudden start as they raised him.

"There!" he moaned, "I knew they turned me. Do not turn me away from her! Stay! stay!"

He lifted his hand towards the light in the casement above, but it fell heavily.

He was dead in their arms, and they laid him softly on the path beneath the old yew-trees.

Lady Gwendolen spoke first. "Austin," she said, "you remain here with Thorold until Gerard comes with help, then lead him to his chamber. I must go to Mildred."

Tresham was kneeling near the dead Earl. He did not look up, but in a voice broken with grief he warned Gwendolen that he alone must go to Mildred.

At his command Austin and Gerard carried

the body up through the trees; but Tresham pulled Gwendolen aside to show her where they had fought. He was half dazed with remorse and sorrow, and spoke wildly of the haunting shades which would forever linger near the spot.

"What is done is done," said Gwendolen. "My care is for the living, Thorold."

She gently led him onward after the others, murmuring as he went a farewell to his old ancestral trees under which he had done so dark a deed.

VI.

Lady Mildred sat in her chamber above the yew-tree avenue, waiting for the Earl who lay slain on the path below. She was alarmed at his delay, but there were numberless excuses with which she might quiet her fears. Yet he had never failed her before, and it was doubly strange that on this last night of all he should not come as he had appointed. With the passing hours she grew more and more fearful for his safety. There was nothing that she could do. She was helpless and utterly alone. Any voice, any presence, would have been welcome, and she silently prayed for some relief.

Just then there were footsteps in the hall outside her door, and a voice called,—

"Mildred!"

"Come in! Heaven has heard my prayer," she said. But when she saw who it was she shrank back.

"You, Thorold, and alone? Oh, no more cursing!"

He motioned her to sit down, and he himself sank exhausted into a chair. He was very pale, and dared not look at her. She was engrossed with her own fears, but she saw his face and trembled at its expression.

"Say it, Thorold." She spoke in a hard and bitter tone. "Deliver all you came to say,—the thought that makes you so pale."

"My thought?" he asked, absently.

"All of it," she muttered. "I can bear it."

"My thoughts were of long ago, Mildred," he said, reflectively. "How we waded after those water-lilies till the plash surprised us, and you did not dare to go on or turn back, so we stood laughing and crying till Gerard came. How idle some men's thoughts are! Dying men's, Mildred——"

He spoke the name kindly, and she asked, with eyes half turned his way, how it happened that he had softened towards her.

He had been too severe in the morning, he said, and asked her to forgive him. She thought he might be mocking her, and was distressed anew, but he soothed her tenderly, and asked

her again to forgive him. Then she started up with quick fright. She had instinctively divined the reason for the change in him.

"Why does not Henry Mertoun come to-night?" she asked, with wild alarm.

There was a pause. Each looked at the other doubtfully.

"You've murdered him!" she screamed. "And must I forgive this, this and all? And yet I do pardon you, Thorold. How very wretched you must be!"

"He bade me tell you," began Tresham, gaining courage to speak from her pitying accents; but she cut him short with an imperious gesture.

"I forbid your utterance of it! What you will not tell, that I will hear:—how you murdered him—but no!—you'll tell me that he loved me. Enough, I pardon you!"

He was indeed wretched. Sunken in shape and pale of face, misery had overtaken and broken him completely. Pardon, he said, must come from another Judge, whose doom he waited with despondency and fear.

Mildred was aroused to a newer and fiercer womanhood. She stood erect and spoke without pity the bitterness that was in her heart.

"*He* shall tell me his last words and take my answer; not in words, but in my heart of hearts, which death——"

"Death," gasped Tresham. "You are dying too? Well said, Gwendolen! I dared not hope it."

"Tell Gwendolen I loved her, and tell Austin——"

"You loved him," broke in Tresham; then in beseeching tones, "And me, Mildred?"

She was softened by his humility, and reproached him but little for the deed. He told her how he had done it not in wantonness, but in ignorance, and under sudden impulse to avenge her wrong. Had he but seen her purity through the troubled surface of crime,—had he but known their story before, he would have stayed his hand. She forgave him, and fell at last upon his bosom.

"There," she murmured, "do not think too much on the past, Thorold. You hurt him under the shadow of a cloud, and is that past retrieve? I have his heart, you know. I may dispose of it,—I give it to you, Thorold. It loves you as mine loves you!"

With a sudden spring she rose from his arms. Her hands were at her throat, and she gasped for breath. Then she fell heavily forward and threw her arms anew about him. He laid her gently in the chair. But she was dead, clasping him in a sweet embrace.

Gwendolen came hurriedly to the door. "Mil-

dred! Tresham!" she called, and presently rushed in with Austin. "Thorold! I could desist no longer. Ah, she swoons,—that's well."

"Oh! better far than that, Gwendolen," he said, gravely.

"She's dead!" said Gwendolen, touching her cold brow. "Let me unlock her arms from about you." And she tried gently to free Tresham from the pathetic embrace.

"She threw them about me so, and blessed me, and then died. You'll let them stay now, Gwendolen?" he asked, pleadingly.

Gwendolen directed Austin to leave Mildred and look to Thorold. He was whiter than she, and a froth was oozing through his clinched teeth.

"Thorold, Thorold! why was this?" cried Gwendolen.

He told her in faltering sentences. He had drunk the poison because earth could be no longer earth to him; the life was gone out of life.

"Already Mildred's face is peacefuller," he said, faintly. "I see you, Austin. Here is my hand; put it in yours. You, Gwendolen, yours too. You are Lord and Lady now. You are Treshams. Name and fame are yours. You hold our 'scutcheon up, Austin; no blot on it. You see how blood must wash our blot away; the first blot came and the first blood came."

"No blot shall come again," said Austin, soothingly.

"I said that," murmured Tresham, "yet it did come. Should it come again, remember, vengeance is God's, not man's!"

His fluttering spirit passed out, and the stain of Mildred's guilt had rich atonement.

AURORA LEIGH.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

AURORA LEIGH.

I.

It is my own story that I mean to tell you. I am still young. I have not gone very far inland from the shores which babies see when they smile in their sleep. I can recall my mother beside the nursery door with a warning finger. "Hush!" she would say; "too much noise," while her sweet eyes took part against her. I still sit, as after she had left us, and feel my father's hand stroke my curls out across his knee. Even now I can hear Assunta's daily jest,—she knew he liked it far better than a better jest,—"How many golden scudi go to make up such ringlets?"

My mother was a Florentine, whose rare blue eyes were shut upon me forever when I was scarcely four years old. I was born to make my father a sadder man, for she was weak and frail, and could not endure the joy of giving me life. Women know best how to rear up children. They have a simple and tender knack of tying sashes, and of stringing pretty words

that have no meaning till they kiss one into them. Children learn by such merry play the real truth of love, and early find out the kindness of life without succumbing to its solemnity. Fathers, perhaps, love as well,—mine did, I know,—but in a more conscious and heavier way.

My father was an austere Englishman, who, after a life spent at home amid the gossips of his college and his native parish, was overtaken with a sudden passion which blotted out all the traditions of his past.

One day in Florence, where he had come for a month to study Da Vinci's drains, he was musing absently along the streets, when, in the great square of the Santissima, he saw drifting by him a train of priestly banners and some maidens in white veils, crowned with roses. They were holding up tall waxen tapers, which, so heavy were they for the slight wrists, slanted into the bright air, and dropped the melting wax as they went. Among this long trail of chanting priests and girls, one face flashed on his inattentive sight and shook him to the heart with an unaccustomed vibration. The maidens were on their way to eat the Bishop's wafer, and he also, like them, received his sacramental gift, for instantly he fell in love.

But, beloved as she was, my mother died. I

have heard it said that to see him in the first surprise of his widowhood, nursing me as if his large hands were afraid to touch my curls and tarnish the gold, and his grave lips contriving somehow a miserable smile, would almost make the stones cry out for pity.

But he set a pathetic verse over her grave in Santa Croce, and then we left Florence and hid among the mountains above Pelago: he with his silent grief, and I, his prattling child. He thought a motherless babe had need more than others of Mother Nature, and he would often tell me how Pan's white goats had once come to feed two poor orphans like his own. His friends say that he loved to talk such scraps of scholarship, for even the most prosaic of men who wear grief overlong begin to tip it aside like a hat with a flower stuck in it.

We lived for many years there in the mountains, with God's silence outside and our own within-doors. Old Assunta, who made up the fires, would often cross herself when a sudden flame lighted up my mother's portrait which hung on the wall above. It was painted after she was dead, and when the artist had finished the face and hands, instead of the hateful English shroud, they gave him the brocade she last wore at the Pitti palace. "He should paint nothing sadder than that," swore her faithful

cameriera, and the effect was therefore very strange. I, as a little child, would crouch for hours on the floor, with drawn-up knees, gazing across half in terror at it with its swan-like and supernaturally white throat and face sailing up from the stiff red silk which seemed to be no part of it, nor to have power to keep it from breaking out of bounds.

Assunta's awe and my father's melancholy both pointed to some mysterious connection with the picture, and my thoughts all wandered that way even when it was out of my sight. But while I stared my childish wits away upon it, my father, who, through the kindling influences of love, had thrown off the old conventions, yet had found no time to grow familiar again with the sun,—whom love had unmade from a common man, but not yet made anew into an uncommon man,—my poor father taught me what he knew best before he died. I learned all his love and grief, and, as we had no lack of books among the hills, I learned from them also under his grave guidance the vanity of human wisdom.

They tell me I am like my dear father, but with broader brows upon slenderer features; paler, but nearly as grave. But my mother's smile breaks up my face now and then and makes it better than it truly is.

Well, we spent nine full years hidden with God among the mountains. I was just thirteen, still growing, and with an intense, strong, struggling heart. Then my father died. His last word was, "Love—love, my child, love, love!" but before I could answer he was gone, and I had no one to love in the wide world.

Thus ended my childhood. What next succeeded I recollect as men do after fevers, threading back the passages of delirium. But at last, one day, a stranger came with authority to take me away from old Assunta. She let my arms go from about her neck with a shriek, while I, too full of my father's silence to cry back, stared with a child's astonishment at her grief, and saw the wharf, where she stood moaning, slowly recede from me. The white walls and blue hills of my Italy drew backward from the shuddering steamer-deck; then the sea pushed between us, and, sweeping up the ship and my despair together, threw us out to the hovering stars.

We travelled on for ten nights and days, then came to the frosty cliffs of England. How could I ever find a home among those mean red houses I saw through the fog? When I first heard my father's language from alien lips I wept aloud and laughed by turns, until they said I was mad from too much sea-sickness. But the

train sped on, and, as I looked from its flying windows, I could not believe this cold and dull land to be the England so much loved by my father. I asked myself, "Did Shakespeare and his mates really absorb the light here?" Not a hill or stone was there to strike up a ray of color in the whole blurred landscape.

At last we arrived. Even now I can see my father's sister stand on the hall-step of her country-house to welcome me. She was straight and calm, her forehead, somewhat narrow, braided tight, as if to bridle her thoughts from wayward impulses. She had brown hair pricked with gray, though she was not old: she was my father's elder by only a single year. Her nose was sharply drawn, yet in delicate lines, and her mild mouth was a little soured about the ends through speaking unrequited loves or niggardly half-truths. The eyes were of no positive color. They might have smiled once, but they had never forgotten themselves into actual laughter. The cheeks still bore a rose from far-away summers, like those pressed in a book and kept rather for sorrow than pleasure. If they were past bloom, they were also past fading.

She had lived a harmless life of tranquillity and passive virtue, which was in fact scarcely a life at all. The vicar, the country squires, and

now and then, as a special condescension, the lord-lieutenant, would drop in to drink tea. Once a year, too, the apothecary was admitted, to prove that humility was not lacking in the household. She was a constant contributor to the poor-club, because, after all, as she said, we are of one flesh and blood, and need the same flannels,—of course, with a proper difference in quality; the book-club, guarded, as it properly was, from the vanities of literature, supplied her a tepid mental nutriment. She lived a sort of cage-bird life. Having been born in a cage, she considered it quite joy enough for any bird just to leap from one perch to another.

But, alas, I, a scarcely fledged wild bird, was brought to her cage, and she was there to meet me, oh, so very kind! She called promptly for the clean water, and commanded them to give out the fresh bird-seed!

She was on the steps calmly waiting to receive me,—she wore a black dress,—and I came up and clung about her neck. I could hear my father's words: "Love, love, my child!" Even she in her black garb might be brought to feel the ardor of my love. She was his sister once, and I clung to her.

For a moment she really seemed moved, and kissed me with her cold lips. She drew me feebly through the hall into her sitting-

room. Then, in a strange spasm of pain and passion, she wrung my hands loose with an imperious movement and held me at arm's length. Her two steel-gray eyes searched through my face feature by feature, as if to find a wicked murderer in it. Drawing a long breath, she tried to assume her ordinary calmness, but sadly missed it, and told me not to shrink, just as if she were telling me not to lie or swear. "She loved my father," she said, "and would love me too, if I deserved it."

I understood afterwards what she had scanned my face for. She expected to find a likeness of my mother there. She had loved my father as truly and fondly as she was able; but she hated, with all the bitterness of gentle souls when they are brought to hate another, the Tuscan woman who had fooled a wise man away from his habitual courses and obvious duties, deprived his sister of the household precedence, wronged his tenants, robbed his native land, and made himself mad in life as well as in death. She had pondered for years what sort of woman could be suitable to her sort of hate, until her very curiosity had become hate also. All the idealism she had ever known had been used with the same malevolence, till hate exceeded the love out of which it originally grew, and wrinkled her conscience

with a sense of its presence in her, so that she winced when Christian doctrine was preached of a Sabbath.

Thus, to me, my father's sister was my mother's enemy. From that day forth she did her duty by me, and I appreciate it, but it was a duty well pressed out and always prudently measured. She was generous, bland, more courteous than tender, and always gave me the first place, as if fearing the Saints might look down suddenly and accuse her of missing a point through lack of love. But a mother is never afraid to speak crossly to her child, because she knows that love fully justifies all her acts.

I was, on the whole, a good child, quite meek and very manageable. In fact, I did not live a free enough life to have the graver faults. There seemed to me more true life in my father's grave than in all England beside. I thought only of lying quiet there where I had been cast, and, as with sea-weed on the rocks, suffering her to prick whatever pattern in me she chose until all the sea-salt had dried out of me. For this reason I bound up my curls in braids: she liked smoothly-combed hair. I also left off saying my sweet Tuscan words, which would come back to me at any stirring of the heart, because she desired my father's child to speak

his own tongue. I learned the collects and catechism to please her, and read various popular synopses of inhuman doctrine which had never been taught by John, because she liked instructed piety. I learned also my complement of classic French,—carefully excluding Balzac,—and German as well, since she liked a liberal range of education. I went briefly into algebra and mathematics, and touched lightly on the sciences. I drew neatly-draped goddesses from French engravings, and washed in—rather say washed out—landscapes from nature. I learned to dance, the polka and Cellarius; spun glass; stuffed birds; modelled wax-flowers; and read a score of books on womanhood to prove that if women do not think much themselves they yet may teach thinking quite ably to others. In brief, my aunt liked a woman to be womanly, and Englishwomen, she thanked God, and sighed (some people always sigh in thanking God), were models to the universe. Then at last I learned the cross-stitch, because she disliked to see me sit through the evenings with empty hands.

As I look back over those years of education, I wonder if Brinvilliers could have suffered more in the water-torture, flood succeeding flood as it did to drench the impotent throat and split the veins. Some feeble souls go out under such

a process; many pine away to lifelong sickness; I somehow endured: I had relations in the Unseen, and drew elemental nourishment and heat from Nature, just as earth feels the sun at night. I kept the life which was thrust upon me on the outside; and I thank God for all the inner life, with its ample room for heart and lungs, and for will and intellect, unhindered by conventions.

At first I was the personification of patience: did whatever she bade me without heed of anything else beyond it. I sat in the chair she would place for me with its back to the window to keep out the sight of the great lime-tree on the lawn, that seemed to have come there from the woods on purpose to bring a message to us; I walked demurely through her low carpeted rooms; I read her books; was civil to her cousin Romney Leigh; listened to her vicar; served tea to her visitors, and heard them whisper (I blushed for joy to hear it), as I handed a cup, "The Italian child, notwithstanding her blue eyes and quiet ways, thrives badly in England. She is paler even than when we came the last time. She will die in this climate."

My cousin, Romney Leigh, blushed also at this, and, approaching me with sudden anger, said low, between his teeth, "You're wicked now! Do you wish to die and leave the world

dark for others when your own light is blown out?"

I looked defiantly into his face. He might have known, I said, that being what I was, it was natural for me to like to get away as far as I could; indeed, some people cause less trouble by dying. He turned and slammed the door abruptly and shut his dog out.

Romney Leigh, my cousin, was my elder by a few years; but he was cold and shy, yet tender enough, too, when he thought of it. He was master of Leigh Hall, the nightmare of which sat upon his youth, repressing all its delights. When he came back from college to the country, he very often crossed the hill on visits to my aunt, to whom he brought blue grapes from his hot-houses, while in his other hand he carried a book,—which proved always to be mere statistics if I chanced to turn over its leaves. She almost loved him, and even sometimes allowed that he seemed to sigh my way. It made him easier to be pitiful, and as for sighing, it was his gift.

So, sometimes, she would let him shut up my music, or push down my needles, and lead me out to see the figs that grew black at the south angle of the house, almost as if they throve by a Tuscan rock. At other moments she would turn her head or go to fetch something, and

leave me long enough to speak to him,—of course, for his sake,—that was simple enough. Sometimes, too, he looked as if he would like to rescue me utterly and forever from my uncongenial life. Once he stood so near me that he suddenly dropped a hand on my head, which was bent down over my woman's work. It touched me as soft as rain, but I rose up and shook it off as if it were fire,—a stranger's touch to take the place of my father's and yet dare to seem soft!

I used him for a friend before I ever knew him to be one. It was better, but also worse afterwards. We came so close together we saw our differences too intimately. Romney Leigh was always looking for the worms, I for the gods. His was a godlike nature, in that it looked downward incurious of itself; and perhaps it is well I should remember how, in those days, I was a worm too, and he looked down on me.

Maybe through his acts of kindness, yet more through something in myself, I certainly did not die. Slowly, like one in a swoon, to whom life creeps back in the form of death, with a sense of separation and a roar in the ears as of retreating chariots, I awoke and rose up. Where was I? I asked myself. In the world, my heart said, and for uses I must count worth fulfilling.

I had all to myself a little chamber as green as a privet hedge where a bird might choose to build, though her nest itself were only of dead sticks and straws. The carpet was pure green, the small bed was curtained with green, and the folded shades hung green about the window that let in the out-door world with its own abundant greenery. You could not so much as push your head forth without getting a dash of dew from the honeysuckle,—but you were baptized so into the privileges and graces of seeing.

First came the lime,—I had enough, there, of the lime, be sure,—my morning dream was hummed away by the bees in it. Past the lime was the ample lawn, which, after sweeping in wide slopes around the house, went trickling down through the shrubberies in a stream of tender turf, and lost itself among the acacias, over which you saw the irregular line of elms that bordered the deep lane. The lane itself was out of sight. It was sunk so deep that no foreign tramp or driver of Welsh ponies could guess whether such odors came from a lady's hall or a tenant's lodge, yet his crooked stick might pull down the low trails of blossoming brier that dipped from the wall.

Behind the elms, again, and through their tops, you could see the folded hills, among the

burly oaks of which smoked my cousin Romney Leigh's chimneys, showing where Leigh Hall was hid by the woodlands about it.

Thus entreated and helped by the sweet influences without-doors, I could not be wholly unthankful. Before the house was awake, and long after it slept, I would sit alone in my room drawing in the blessings of nature. The great mother came in softly, with a gradual step among the leaves, a breath, or a ray of light, and the angels seemed to make a place for her beside me as they swept the room clean of foolish thoughts. The sun would come in, too, saying, "Shall I lift the light thus against the elm-tree and you not look? Listen, I make the birds sing for you, yet God never hears your voice save when you lie on your bed at night and weep."

Then something moved me. I wakened very slowly; but at last I threw the window of my soul wide open and let the out-door sights sweep new gospels in. I used to get up very early just to watch the morning quicken in the gray light. I liked to hear the silence draw apart like a flower leaf after leaf, while I stroked the woodbine through the casement; and at last I came to do it at unawares with a sort of foolish love.

Temptation comes with the experiences of

joy, and I often, after this, slipped down-stairs through the noiseless house, and escaped, like a soul from a body, into the garden. I would glide through the shrubberies, drop into the lane, and wander an hour or two on the hills before the household was up. I had my books, too, in my little chamber, and read them as I liked, without considering much whether they were fit for me or not. Indeed, we get no good from a book by being ungenerous to it and calculating the profits that may accrue from reading it. It is rather when we gloriously forget ourselves and plunge headlong into a book's heart that we get the right good from it. After I had read much for memory I began to read for hope. I trod the pathway my father had traced out for me, striving to push through the thorny underwood and gain the shelter of the trees.

At last, one day, I found a secret garret-room in the old house, which was piled high with cases marked with my father's name. I nibbled here and there at these, and pulled through the gaps in a kind of joyous terror the first book I could reach. Ah, how I felt it beating under my pillow of a morning, a whole hour before the sun would come up and let me read it!

At last, perhaps it was because the time was ripe, I chanced upon a set of the poets. My

soul, at the touch of their immortal verse, altogether let go conventions and sprang up convicted of the great eternities.

Then I found that I, too, could write, and I strung myriads of false verses together like the rest, thinking them true, perhaps, because I was sincere in writing them; and yet I have, peradventure, written true ones since with less complacence.

But I could not long hide my kindling inner life from those about me. They now and then saw a light at a window which they had not set there, and they questioned, Who had set it there? My aunt started when she saw my awakened soul looking out of my eyes. She could not tell me I had no business with that sort of soul, but she plainly objected to it.

"Aurora," sometimes she would ask, "have you done your work this morning? Have you read that book, and are you ready for the crochet?" It was as if she had said, "I know there's something wrong. I have not ground you down enough to bake you into a wholesome crust for household proprieties." Then I would answer, quietly, "Will you hear my lesson and verify the abstract I have made from the book, or shall I sit down to the crochet-work?" Perhaps I would sit down and ply the needle for hours together. But I was not sad, for my soul was

singing at quite another kind of work behind its walls of sense, as safe from all harm as the lark seems up in the blue air.

Thus between enforced and spontaneous work the inner life formed the outer, reducing the irregular blood to settled rhythms which struck some fresh color across my cheeks, faint though it was. I clinched my brows above my blue eyes in the looking-glass, and said, "We'll live, Aurora! we'll be strong. The dogs are upon us, but we will not die without a struggle."

Whoever lives a true life will learn to love true love. I learned to love England so, and very often before the day was up, or through the long windings of the afternoons, I would throw off my hunters and plunge among the deep hills, like a stag that takes to the water shivering with the fear and passion of the course. But sometimes I was admitted to the company of Romney and his friend Vincent Carrington, a rising artist, who was said to have a bee in his bonnet because he held that if you painted a body well you also, by implication, painted a soul. They were pleasant enough walks, these I took in company, for if the artist happened to say, "When I was last in Italy," it sounded to me like an instrument played too far off for the tune, and yet sweet to listen to.

Often, if Cousin Romney was pleased to take

me out, there were only two of us abroad together. We would read, talk, or quarrel as it might chance. We were not lovers, nor even very well matched friends, scholars rather on different tracks, thinkers who disagreed. He was overfull of what is, and I was overbold for what might be.

When the thrushes sang, I would hold up my finger and bid him mark that notwithstanding it was an evil world, as he said, certainly the thrushes still sang in it. Then his brow would soften, and he bore with me in a sort of melancholy patience. "See!" I would cry, "God is surely with us on this earth; and shall we put him down by the things we do? Who says there's nothing but poverty for the poor and vile? See this!" And I jumped ankle-deep in the grass and clapped my hands for the very joy of being.

II.

So time went on, and one day I stood upon the brink of my twentieth year. I was very happy that June morning, for I felt young and strong and seemed very sure of God. I bounded forth in the early dawn without thinking of a bonnet, for I intended to keep my birthday, at least till my aunt awoke, in the open air. I pulled down the branches to choose a wreath for

myself, for my brows longed to feel the touch of a poet's garland. All the leaves were fair and sweet, and I did not know where to choose; but at last I plucked a spray of ivy, because not a leaf of it grows without meaning to become one day a wreath, and because, too, I liked its strength in climbing and its boldness in leaping a height; then, moreover, how pretty it looks twisted around a comb. So thinking, I twisted the wreath about my head, and was fastening it behind, when, turning suddenly, I faced my cousin Romney. His grave eyes scanned me with a serious glance, and his mouth was graver even than his eyes.

I stood there fixed. My arms were up, like those of a caryatid, in a helpless gesture which mocked their original purpose. I blushed very consciously.

"Aurora Leigh," he said, "the very earliest of Auroras!"

I took the hand he stretched out, like a shipwrecked man indifferent to his means of succor. The tide had caught me at my foolish pastime of writing my name down near the sea, and I was drowned in a blush.

"You, cousin!" I exclaimed.

The smile died out of his eyes and for just a moment hovered across his lips.

"Here's a book I found. No name on it.

Poems, I suppose, by the form. Some Greek on the margin,—lady's Greek, without accents. I did not dare to read it. I saw at a glance the thing had witchcraft in it, so I brought it to the witch herself."

"My book," I said,—"you found it?"

"Yes; in the hollow down there by the stream."

"Thank you, cousin."

"Thank *you*, rather, cousin, that I have not found you too much of a witch and poet to be a woman as well."

The smile came in his grave eyes again as he glanced at my ivy wreath.

"Well, poets must needs exist, whether they be men or women," I said.

"True; but neither men nor women need be poets. Keep to the green wreath, pretty cousin. Even to dream of stone or bronze will bring headaches and soil white dresses."

"So you judge!" I answered, warmly. "For my part, I choose headaches, and to-day's my birthday."

"Dear Aurora," he said, "choose rather to cure them. You have balsams."

"The headache, then, is too noble for my sex; you think the heartache a likelier malady. That's woman's special ache, and very tolerable —except, perhaps, to a woman." Saying this, I loosed my wreath and swung it beside me as we

walked onward. I looked askance at him, trying to divine his thought. He did not answer, and we paced on until, just in sight of the house, he abruptly caught at one end of the swinging wreath.

"Aurora," was all he said.

I stopped short.

Then he began anew: "Aurora, come, let us be serious, and stop playing at this game of head and heart. Life means both, and both in earnest. That book of yours, I have not read a word of it, and yet the chances are that, being a woman with such a pair of large, calm eyes, you'll write as well—or ill—on the whole, as other women. Even if as well, what then? Even if a little better, still, what then? We want the best, the best only, in art. The time is gone by for facile rearing of small gods. The world's hard pressed: the sweat of labor has turned to acid on the yeoman's brow. There's no time to sit upon a bank and hear the cymbals tinkle in white hands. When Egypt's slain, then let Miriam sing, say I! Before,—our cry is, Where's Moses?"

"Exactly," I replied. "Where's Moses? Can a Moses be found? Not in the bulrushes of to-day. I, at any rate, may be of use with my cymbals in colonizing the bees."

"There it is!" said he. "You play like a child

beside a death-bed. Women never understand these things. You make doting mothers and perfect wives, even sublime Madonnas; but we get no Christ from you, and, in my mind, we shall never get a poet."

"From which you conclude——?" said I.

"Only this, Aurora: that you, with that large, live brow, cannot condescend to play at art. You will never be satisfied with the kind of praise men give a woman when they judge her book,—not as mere work, but as mere woman's work. 'What delicate discernment! It nearly approaches to thought. We make room among our female authors for another fair writer. The country that can produce such women, competent to—spell——'"

"Stop there!" I cried. "You have read my soul, if not my book. Surely, I would not condescend for such praise. Far better to pursue a frivolous trade seriously than a sublime art frivolously."

"Then choose nobler work than either," he said. "You and I are young, Aurora. We have come too late into the world. It is swollen hard with the sins of perished generations. But can we stand calmly by and make no effort to cure the disease?"

"Ah, cousin," I said, "I have not been very long on the strand of life, and these salt waters

have scarcely yet wet my feet. I cannot judge the tides now. Perhaps I shall do better hereafter. A woman is always younger than a man of the same age, because she is kept away from the maturing out-door sun and air. You men judge otherwise, I know. You think a woman grows ripe as a peach does, chiefly in the cheeks. I am not able to solve your hard social questions, but I can applaud Christian thoughts that outrun personal aims. Accept my reverence, cousin."

He glowed upon me with all his face and eyes.

"No other help?" he said. "No more than that?"

"What help?" I asked. "You'd scorn other help from me, as Nature, you say, has scorned to intrust her music to me, because I am a woman. Now you turn round and ask for what you say a woman cannot give you."

"I ask for what she only can give," he said, catching my hands and looking down on me with all the passion of his soul. "I ask for love; for a life of fellowship through bitter duties; for wifehood, — will she give me that?"

"Now may God be witness betwixt us two," I said, and, with the words, I seemed to float in a sudden light far above his stature. "Am I

too weak to stand alone," thought I, "yet strong enough to bear such an added weight on my shoulders?" I paused a moment,—perhaps my face darkened a trifle,—then I went on: "Yes, that's always the way: anything will do for a wife."

"Aurora, dear," he said, eagerly, "you translate me ill. I do not contradict my reverent thought of you with another which is any the less so. If your sex is weak in art,—and when I said so it was but to use truth in courtship,—it is strong in life and duty. Ah, my sweet! come with me, and we'll go together where your touch shall heal the world's victims. Every man there will seem a brother, every woman will wear your mother's face."

"You do well to name her face," I answered, slowly. "Though she was taken from me so soon, I have found little love since, save in that one face. What you love is not a woman, Romney: you simply want a helpmate. Your cause is noble, indeed; but I have another conception of love, so fare you well!"

"Farewell, Aurora? You reject me, then?"

"Oh, you were married long ago, Romney, to your social theory. Bless you both!"

"So you jest as usual," he said, bitterly.

"No; I speak in good earnest."

"And must it indeed be farewell?" he pleaded.

"Was I so much mistaken when I took woman to be nobler than man, and yourself the noblest of women? Wrong, too, in venturing to say the truth out bluntly to you, instead of using the old romantic formula, 'Lady, thou art wondrous fair; turn round and love me or I will die!'"

"You misconceive the question," I broke in, with restrained indignation. "Whoever says 'Love me and work with me' to a woman will get a fair answer if the work and love, however good in themselves, are good for her,—the very best she was born for. For me, your work is not the best, nor your love. You force me, sir, to be overbold in thus speaking of myself; but I, too, have my vocation. The artist must keep roads open between the seen and the unseen. It takes the ideal to blow a hair's-breadth from the dust of the actual. Perhaps, as you say, I'm not worthy of work like this; yet I aspire, and if I fail, why, burn up my straw like other false works, and all's done."

I remember the very last word I said that day like the creaking of a door which has once let in some bad news. I know I did not love him, nor he me, and what I said I have never repented of, as the truth never is repented of. Yet he was a princely fellow, and if he had loved me truly—well, I might have been a con-

ventional mother now, perhaps happier and better after all.

But as we were parting, a hurried footstep came towards us on the grass, and my aunt, with her smile of welcome distorted by the sun, broke in with,—

"Romney—here! Why, my child, entreat him to come into the house, and have your talk out there, if girls must talk on their birthdays."

He answered for me very calmly. His pale lips seemed to try in vain to smile.

"The talk is ended, here where we stand, madam," he said. "Your brother's daughter has dismissed me. Farewell."

Then he vanished. I could hear his heel ringing bluntly down the lane.

"What means this, Aurora Leigh?" cried my aunt. "My brother's daughter has been dismissing my guests?"

The lion in me was tamed at the keeper's voice. I was quelled before her and prayed her pardon.

"I little thought to dismiss a friend of yours, aunt. I simply let a friend go who came to take me into his service as a wife."

"Why, you must be mad!" she flashed back at me. "Do you mean to tell me to my face that Romney Leigh has asked you to marry him and you have refused him?"

"Did he ask?" said I. "Rather, I think he stooped to employ me to do certain duties he had for a wife. He never asked at all."

"What stuff!" she said. "Why, they act like queens, these haughty girls. They must have mantles stitched with twenty silks and spread out at their feet before they'll take a step towards the noblest lover ever born."

"But, dear aunt," I said, "I was born to walk in other ways than those of his choosing."

"You walk! you walk!" she cried. "Why, a year-old baby will walk as well as you. God help you, you are groping in the dark. You suppose, perhaps, that you, the sole offspring of a wealthy man, are rich and free to walk where you will? You think, too,—and it's reasonable enough,—that I, being well-to-do, will leave my handful to you. But pray, child, pray, even though you do not love me, that I may not die, for when I do out you go, unless I make room for you in my grave,—out you go from house and home, without the right to a single blade of grass beneath these trees. This is the fruit my brother planted in his foreign loves,—don't look astonished at me with your mother's great eyes, —for it was they who set you where you are now, a dowerless orphan. Your father's choice of that mother disinherited his daughter. Men do not think of sons and daughters when they

are in love, much less of sisters, otherwise he would have paused before he broke that clause in the entail excluding offspring by a foreign wife,—the clause set up a century ago by a Leigh who wedded a French dancing-girl and had his heart danced upon as his reward. Our cousin Vane, Romney's father, wrote directly after you were born to your father in Italy: 'I ask your daughter for my son, in whom by law the entail now merges. Betroth her to us for love alone, and she shall not lose either by love or law hereafter.' You remember Vane, and how he drew you up to his knees just before he died and wished your cheeks redder? And now his son, to whom my pittance shall go,—except a few books and a pair of shawls,—is generous like him and prepared to carry out his word and thought to you. Surely, a fine young man is Romney, though he is fevered now with these dreams of doing good to good-for-nothing people. But a wife will put all that straight."

Here I interrupted. I could scarce lift my head to breathe till now, but at last I raised it, and the words came in broken syllables:

"There's no need for him to wait. The dream of doing good to me, at least, is ended. We've escaped that danger, and thank Heaven for it."

"You, too, have taken the fever!" she cried.

"What! I tell you plainly that you will be homeless, friendless, without your cousin, and you still maintain there's room between you for flirting fans and such coquetry! Why, you do not value a noble heart above book-patterns. Fie, fie—but stay, I'll write to Romney and set all straight again."

She would have hurried in, but I clung to her arm.

"Oh, dear aunt, hear me! I say no, no! I can at least live my soul's life without alms from men. If it must be in heaven instead of earth, why, I am not afraid."

She seized both my hands in hers and pierced me through with her probing eyes.

"And yet, you foolish sweet, you love this man," she said, slowly and coaxingly. "I've watched you when he came and went, and when we've talked about him. I know the weather-signs of love. You love him, Aurora."

I blushed, I know. I can feel the brand on my forehead even now; and she interpreted this for a sign. Then the next minute I grew white and cold. As my blood recoiled from the indignity, I made my heart great with it. I spoke at last some passionate words all ground up with sobs. She let my hands drop, and her smile vanished into sedate disgust.

"We'll have no Italian manners, if you please,"

she said. "You had an English father, and might find it possible to speak a quiet yes or no like English girls. In another month you'll give a different answer."

With this she went in and left me standing in the garden.

I cried a little with agitation and dread, and then I could not help smiling.

"Farewell, good Romney," I murmured to myself. "Even if I loved you I could not afford to let you be so generous to me."

I stooped down then and picked up the soiled garland from where it had fallen. I have kept it ever since. It is in the drawer over there. It was the first, and the rest are all like it.

Afterwards, before evening, I had a note, which ran:

"Sweet Chaldean, you read me backward as they do Eastern books. Read a little plainer now. Did you really hate me yesterday? I loved you truly, for my part. If I spoke untenderly this morning, pardon me, and believe that I love you so much I place you on the level of my own soul. Henceforth you shall be planted out of the reach of my habitual thoughts, and lean any side you please; only let me have your perfume always about my home."

In answer to this I wrote:

"We Chaldeans see deeper than we read. I did not hate you yesterday, and yet I do not love you enough to-day. Take this word frankly, and let it stop you from speaking further. This flower you would transplant has to say to you only what the antique tomb said to travellers: '*Siste, viator.*' Pause."

A week passed without incident, and several after likewise. Romney did not come, and my aunt refrained from chiding me. I lived on and on as if my heart were kept beneath a glass cover, and everybody stood all eyes and ears to see it and hear it tick.

But in the sixth week the dead sea suddenly broke up. The clock had struck nine one morning, the lark's song came floating down to me through the still July weather, and the woodbine blew in and out of my window. There I sat in peace, and wished such a morning truce could last forever. Oh that my aunt might sleep on and spare me from her prying eyes!

Suddenly, from the bottom of the house, there arose a single ghastly shriek, and in an instant the whole interior was alive with the clamor of voices and slamming of doors.

I sprang up and stood in the middle of the room. There, confronting me at my door, was a white face with shivering lips.

"Come, come!" they said. And, without asking

a question, I went reeling down-stairs as if I were drawn by a ghost.

There sat my aunt bolt upright in the chair by her bed. She had used no bed that night, yet she slept overwell. The silent derision pictured on her face seemed to mock at the sun which had streamed into the chamber when Susan drew the curtains, ignorant of who sat open-eyed behind her. The rigid figure held a letter with an unbroken seal in its hand, as Susan had delivered it the night before.

I could not believe that those were the eyes which had watched me so searchingly and dogged me up and down for days together. I had prayed only a half-hour back to be rid of their burden, had bid them sleep late and free me of their scrutiny, and now they slept indeed. God answers some prayers with a strange suddenness. Every wish is like a prayer with Him, and at last I had my one wish gratified,—to fashion my life in my own way, and marry or not marry as I pleased.

The heir came over to the funeral, and we met once more by the dead. When the will had been read and all the rest had left the house, we rose up in a silence which was almost hard and looked keenly at one another.

"Farewell, cousin," I said.

He just touched my hat-strings, already tied

for going. The carriage stood waiting at the door.

"*Siste, viator*," he said in a low voice, a little unsteady.

"Is there time to stop for a moral in these days of railroads?" I asked.

"For necessary words, there is," he gravely answered. "We have just heard a will which gives you all the money and personal property of your aunt."

"I thank her memory for it," I said. "With three hundred pounds I can buy standing-room to work in."

"Yet, cousin," he said, "you are richer than you imagine. The will says, 'Three hundred pounds and any other sum which the said testatrix dies possessed of.' She died possessed of other sums."

"Dear Romney," I said, "need we count the odd pence? I'm richer than I thought I was, that's evident."

"But listen; you've got to do with a cousin who understands business. The other sum is thirty thousand pounds. It is unspecified in any will which dates after its possession, yet it is bequeathed to you as clearly as this three hundred pounds. Now, when and where will you have it paid?"

"Pause there," I said. "You are delicate in

your manner of making gifts; but I, who am also a Leigh, am made rather for giving than for taking like a pensioner."

I turned to go, but he stopped me with a proud gesture.

"A Leigh gives love or largesse, but never glosses in giving. Least of all would he do that to a Leigh. But now let me make it clear to you that your aunt owned this money."

"You must bring documents and prove dates, then," I said.

"Ah, now you throw off your bonnet as if you had time for a logarithm. I know your thoughts, cousin. I inherit your father's wealth and make you poor. Under ordinary conditions you might feel like taking some compensation. But, beside this, I love you, and you reject me. You cannot take from a suitor's hand what would come without objection from a relative's. Yet you'll trust me, won't you, to keep your honor pure?"

"I believe in no honor kept by another," I answered. "You face a man who wants instruction, not a woman who wants protection. Speak out plainly as you would to a man. Be precise; give dates and facts. My aunt inherited this sum, you say——"

"I said she died possessed of it, cousin."

"Not by heritage, then? We're getting at last to the facts."

"Well, there was no cause why your aunt should refuse a deed of gift from me, was there?"

"Ah, I thought so!" I exclaimed. "A gift!"

"Very natural to think so," he said, "and a very natural gift."

"Surely," I replied; "yet, her own life being placed safe above all want, she was too proud to accept a gift without some ultimate aim. Ah, I see: the gift was plainly intended for her heirs. I am snared then, perhaps. Just so. But, sir, how can you justify such an insult?"

"What need is there to tremble and pant like a netted lioness, Aurora? Is it my fault that you are a wild creature of the woods and hate the stall built for you? At any rate, you're entirely free from me."

"And this gift of yours, when was it offered and accepted?" I said. "Come, bring your dates. When was it?"

"What matters that?" he answered. "A half-hour or a half-year before she died makes the gift just as binding. No power can make you poor again now, cousin."

"Well, sir, I ask you—I insist on the special date," said I, with firmness.

"The gift was placed in her hands the day before she died. We will find the deed and certify the date to you."

I looked at him in triumph. "My dear cousin Romney," I said, "we have at last reached the top of this difficult question. But I had forgotten to tell you before that this letter—unread, remember, still sealed—was found in the poor dead hand. I know your writing, Romney. You'll find that famous deed of gift in this letter, which, not being mine, I give you back. You refuse to take it? Well, then, you and I, as writer and heiress, open it. Even so,—the words are noble, cousin. Here's a proof of gift, but no proof of acceptance. Rather disproof." As I spoke, I tore the paper up and let it flutter away on the floor.

Then, foiled in his efforts to do me a service, but still serene, he broke the silence:

"I may ask, perhaps, although no stranger, only Romney Leigh, which means even less than Vincent Carrington, what plans you have in leaving here. That cannot be a secret?"

"I am going to London," I said, "to live my life straight out, vocally in books, or, should I fail, still, to live it my own way. And you, Romney?"

"I?" he said. "And you care to ask? Well, girls have curious minds. I've my work, you know. While you sing your happy pastorals, I shall be trying to prove to stifled brains that nature sings itself and asks for no accompany-

ing poet. You lovers of the beautiful despise my system."

"*I* despise? The scorn is your own, cousin. Men become poets only by scorning nothing. They respect your practical good as being a part of beauty itself."

He did not answer, and we stood for an instant in silence. Then I said, "Adieu, Romney." And he helped me into the carriage, and I drove away.

It is seven years since then. I am used now to other ways from quite different men. But we let go our hands, my cousin and I, that day, and the world rushed between us in a torrent, barring forever our mutual sight and touch.

III.

When my cousin and I had thus parted, I travelled to London and took a chamber in Kensington. It was up three flights of stairs, dark and steep, but I worked there serenely for three good years in spite of the solitude. I did some excellent things indifferently and some bad things excellently. I bent to my task day and night. I suppose the roses went out of my cheeks, for people would come and say, "You are working too hard. You look ill." But I smiled pityingly in return for their sympathy, and thought I should be better soon.

One day a lady called whom I had never seen before. She had a low voice, a self-possessed manner, and yet withal was gracious and conciliating. She told me quite simply that her name was Lady Waldemar, as if it meant but little, yet still something. She took my hands and smiled:

"Is this, then, the Muse?"

"Not even a sibyl," I answered, "since she fails to guess why you have taxed yourself to visit her, madam."

"Good! I value sincerity. Perhaps if I had found a real Muse I should indeed have been taxed by the visit." She still panted from the long climb up the stairs, but a silvery laugh ran through her quickened breath.

"Still, your ladyship has left me curious to know why you took the risk of finding such a Muse."

"Well, naturally, you think I've come here as a lion-hunter to entrap you for my drawing-room. But that is not my errand." She bent her head an instant; then, raising it suddenly with a look of queenly command which disdained even to spare herself, she said,—

"I think you have a cousin called Romney Leigh."

"You bring me word from him?" I said, with my eyes leaping up to hers,—"word from him!"

"Word about him. But first," she asked, coaxingly, "you do not love him—do you?"

"You are frank, madam, at least," I replied. "I love Romney in a cousinly way,—nothing more."

"So I guessed," she said. "I'm ready to be as frank in answering, if you will question me. I can speak to you, an artist, who rise somewhat above the common sex, without the shame one feels in confiding in those on our own level. The saints are so far off we lose our modesty before them. May I confide in you? Well, then, frankly, it is *I* who love Romney Leigh."

"But why make such a confession to me? I am not the Muse, still less am I a saint, or even a friend."

"That's unkindly said! If not now a friend, what forbids me to make you one? Indeed, I love your cousin, be it wise or foolish. I have not come to it, however, without a struggle. I tried travel, study, even gaming, but, after all, this love—you eat of love as you do of garlic, and everything else you eat tastes acrid. All my cards turned up Romney Leigh. I came home uncured, convicted to myself of being hopelessly in love. That's coarse, you will say——"

"Never apologize for love," I replied, coldly. "I believe in love and God. I know my cousin;

I do not know you. Yet I can say this: whoever loves him truly should not excuse, but purify herself."

"Ah, dear, be kinder to me," she said. "Let us be friends."

"But I can see no way in which a confidence like this can avail you or him."

"Well, let it pass," she replied; "and yet, if I marry him I save him. Let that pass too."

"Pass, pass!" I cried. "He knows what's worthy of him; the choice remains entirely with him. What he chooses cannot be unworthy."

"I would not ask help for myself," she said. "I ask it only for him. When he, a Leigh, is fairly married to a girl of doubtful life, even you will perhaps call his choice unworthy."

"Married! Romney!"

"Ah, you are moved at last," she said.

"Then there's really a marriage?" I eagerly asked.

"Really and unhappily there is. Yesterday I taxed him with it. 'Mr. Leigh,' I said, 'shut a thing up and it makes more noise. This boiling town is ill at keeping a secret. I've known yours since last week; and do you not choose that even your kin—even Aurora Leigh—should think your act more of a fancy than a sacrifice?' He grew so pale, dear—to the very lips. I

knew I had touched him. 'Do you know her, Aurora Leigh?' he said. 'Yes,' I answered. I lied, but, truly, we all know you by your books; and I offered to go straight to you and justify his cause, and take you to Saint Margaret's Court to see this miracle—a drover's daughter, believe me, named Marian Earle."

"Now," said I, "I begin imperfectly to understand your drift. But how this plan serves your ends I cannot see."

She knit her restless forehead: "Then despite that radiant name, Aurora, you are as dull as a London afternoon. I wanted time, and I gained it. I wanted *you*, and I gain you. You'll go and see the girl, then you'll speak your mind, and prove to Romney in your own brilliant way that he'll wrong you, wrong all who are concerned, by such an execrable marriage."

"But you err," I said, "in supposing that I have power to break the match. I would not do it to save Romney's life."

"You take it so?" And she rose with a tone of bitter surprise in her voice. "Farewell, then. Write your books in peace." She touched my hand lightly and bent her head, then departed, without looking back, down the dark stairs.

Two hours afterwards I stood alone in Saint Margaret's Court. A sick child jeered weakly

at me as I crossed the uneven pavement, while a woman, rouged on her angular cheek-bones and with dangling locks of hair, leaned out at a window and cursed me and some bedridden creature in-doors by turns.

I pushed back a little side door in spite of her menacing voice, and quickly found my way to a low door in the attic. I knocked, and there was a hurried movement within, then some one said,—

"So soon! Can it be Mr. Leigh, so soon?"

I was met by an ineffable face upon the threshold.

"Oh, not you, not you!" she said. And the dropping of the voice implied that if it were not he, it was not any one for her.

I looked full in the sweet eyes and held her hands in my own.

"I am Romney Leigh's cousin, and I have come now to see my other cousin."

Her face and voice touched me deeply. "How can soft flowers like this grow from such rough roots?" I mused, as I felt her hands lie timidly in mine. She was not beautiful at all. She was neither white nor brown, but could look either, like a mist which is colored by the changing sun. Her hair hung in rich curls,—too many perhaps for so small a head, which seemed to droop to one side like a full-blown

rose. The mouth was a trifle large, but the white teeth dissolved it to an infantine smile. The eyes smiled too, but a remembrance of weeping seemed to mingle with their gayety.

We talked on, and she told me her brief story. Her father had been a wandering laborer who had died of drink. Her mother was a fitting mate for him, brutal and coarse; and, because nothing profitable could be done with a delicate child who was always gazing up at the sky or peering listlessly at the fields rather than earning her way, the woman treated her harshly, and welcomed any means of getting rid of her.

One day, her mother, who had been badly beaten, came in suddenly and snatched the comb from Marian's hair, letting the curls fall all about her face. When she could at last see through the blinding mass, the girl beheld a man outside with hungry-looking eyes. His breath seemed to hurt her cheek, he came so close to her. The mother held her tight, saying between her teeth,—

"Why, wench, the squire speaks to you; he's too good: he means to set you up and make your fortune. Be mannerly now."

Marian turned round and looked piteously in her mother's face, but there was no mercy there; then, with a sudden desperation, she tore herself away and bounded headlong down the hill.

They yelled after her like hounds, and she sped on and on till she gained the uplands and was beyond sound of the voices. She ran madly along the white roads mile after mile until she grew dizzy and her heart seemed to be growing bigger and bigger. At last it burst and the light went out of her eyes.

She had fainted and dropped by the roadside.

As her senses returned she found it was night, and she was on a creaking and rumbling wagon, which, in the morning, landed her in the town where the good wagoner's business led him to travel. He took her to a hospital, where she lay sick for many weeks; but a new life of kindness and tender care had opened to her there, and when at last she was able to be sent away, she burst into tears at the thought of leaving.

But on the day before her departure, as she sat dumb and lost among the other convalescents, a visitor who was being ushered through the wards paused among the group and spoke some soothing words. Marian said that his look was like a sweet speech, and his speech was like a song. His name was Romney Leigh, and that was the first time she had seen him.

When it was her turn to hear his comforting talk and he asked her where she meant to go, she burst into sobs.

"Where I go?" she said. "Nobody ever asked me till now. How can I tell where I am going, when it has not seemed worth while, even to God himself, to think of me?"

"You have lost your father and mother?" he asked.

She told him her story.

"Poor child!" he said, with such pity in his voice it soothed her more than her own tears. And even now she could tell me word for word the generous counsel he had given her that happy morning.

He sent her to a sempstress-house in London, and they parted for many months to come.

About a year after this the sewing-girl who sat next to Marian in the work-room where she was employed fell sick, and the gossips said that she was dying. Her name was Lucy Gresham, and the night before, on her way home, she had fainted and been carried to her room, and laid beside her bedridden grandmother.

"The old crone's paralytic," said one of the girls, "and that's why Lucy had to work so hard." Then, seeing tears in Marian's eyes, "But, Marian Earle, you're not fool enough to cry about it, are you?"

Marian stood up, and, breaking abruptly from the circle, left the place. She went directly to Lucy's home, resolved to nurse her as long as

she needed help. Day after day she sat by Lucy's poor bed, constant in her chosen duty. Lucy sometimes thanked her, and she was strangely touched at hearing herself called kind and good,—she, who had been beaten and sold!

But Lucy slipped gently away in sleep one night, and then a man came in and stood by the death-bed, which also held the shrivelled body of the old paralytic. The poor woman feebly screamed that they must not bury her, she was not the corpse, and then she appealed to Marian Earle to show the gentleman where Lucy lay.

"Marian Earle!" said a voice which she seemed to know.

It was the hour for angels to hover near, and there stood hers. And yet she was scarcely surprised to see Romney Leigh. He seemed to come by instinct wherever grief was.

He was not angry with her for leaving the house where he had placed her, and when he found that she was bent on nursing the old woman he did not oppose it. She felt in his eyes and speech a tenderer presence of the soul which understood her and acquiesced.

But at last one day when Marian had smoothed the now empty bed and swept the floor of the coffin-dust, as she stood in the cold room with the door-key in her hand prepared to go, he spoke to her.

"Dear Marian," said he, "God moulded us all of one clay. What difference does it make that I was born to a noble name and you came from the noble people? We all go back to the original clay at last, and why should *we* wait for that?"

She looked blindly in his face, and he held her hand, while her heart beat so thick and fast she could not gather the full sense of his words.

"You are my fellow-worker, Marian, why not be my wife?"

With a childish simplicity and earnestness Marian told me her story down to this point, and here she stopped with no sense of embarrassment or affected shame. I kissed her lips as she ended.

"So indeed he loves you, Marian?" I said.

"Loves me!" She looked up with an infant's wonder. "He loves everything, and me, of course, or he would not have asked me to work with him and be his wife."

Her words reproved me. Obviously she had not thought about his love at all. Women of my own class haggle for the small change of love. She knew that she was crowned, and asked no more.

But before I could say anything in reply Romney was there himself. I think he had been standing in the room while she spoke. He looked as if he had been suddenly arrested in his movements, and he was very pale.

"You here, Aurora?" he said.

"Why, yes, dear Romney. Lady Waldemar sent me here in haste to find a cousin of mine that is to be."

"Lady Waldemar is very good," he said, with measured coldness.

"Here's one, at least, who is good," I said, as I touched Marian's head.

"You accept a gift from me at last, then, Aurora? I have actually pleased you." How changed his voice sounded.

"You cannot please a woman who wills not to be pleased, and, once, you vexed me,—but shall we speak of that? Let it pass rather, for now you please me when you please yourself."

He said nothing, and I went on:

"Poets, you know, Romney, are democrats, and I understand and wholly justify your choice."

"No, no, no!" he sighed, impatiently. "You do not, cannot comprehend my end or my motives! But no matter now. I thank you for your generous cousinship, and I accept for her all your favorable thoughts."

I turned and kissed Marian, for he had baffled and chafed me, and I was driven to her for refuge.

"Good-by for this time," I said; "and, Romney, pardon me the word, I hope you may be

happy,—I mean, of course, in an esoteric sense; and you'll let Marian come to see me, and be married from my house, won't you?"

"I take my wife from the people," he said; "and she comes as Austria's daughter to imperial France, between her eagles, with no shame for her race, from St. Margaret's Court to St. James's. What we do, we do openly without a blush."

He came after me down the stairs and offered to escort me through the hideous streets. We had a strange, melancholy walk in the drizzling rain, talking of many irrelevant things to avoid the one topic which lay closest to our hearts.

When we parted at my own door his good-night sounded strangely, like a parting at a death-bed, and I thought all that night of its ominous sound.

IV.

A MONTH passed, and then came the announcement of the marriage.

The day finally arrived, and I went to St. James's with the fashionable throngs who had been invited and the ragged mob drawn there by curiosity. They clogged the streets and oozed into the church in a dark, slow stream. Noble ladies stood up in their pews to see the sight, while all the aisles were alive with black heads that crawled slowly towards the altar,

showing here and there a hideous face, or in the midst some squalid mother with a baby hanging like a rag at her neck.

We waited long beyond the hour fixed for the wedding, and the confusion grew with the passing time. The buzz of light voices and the rustle of rich dresses mingled with a low growl from the bride's impatient followers. Then a new movement swept through the human mass and an ominous whisper reached us. Something was wrong. What? The black crowd, like an overstrained cord, swayed back and forth, and I caught a glimpse of Romney's face, scarce recognizable in its pallor, where he stood on the altar stair and tried to speak to them. But he failed to make himself heard, and impotently raised an open letter which he held in his hand high above his head to make them attend.

"My brothers, bear with me," he cried. "I am very weak, but I meant only good. Perhaps I was too proud, and God has snatched the circumstance and changed it to punishment. There will be no marriage! She leaves me, disappears; I lose her. Yet I never forced her. My friends, you are dismissed. Go eat and drink according to the programme; but I bid you farewell."

As he ended there was unbroken silence in

the church. A man spoke somewhere through the hush, and the spell was over.

"Look to it, boys. Don't be robbed of the beef and beer. They're not honest with the poor. They'll try to cheat us."

Then others yelled out coarse jokes and comments on the marriage, and some, fancying themselves wronged by the failure of Marian to secure a noble husband, claimed their rights in loud, threatening voices.

Through the rage and roar I could hear the broken words which Romney flung helplessly from his post on the altar stair among the turbulent crowd. From end to end the church rocked around us like a stormy sea. Men cried out "Police!" and women shrieked for God, or dropped and swooned. The last sight I saw was Romney's terrible, calm face above the tumult, and the last sound I remember were the cries of "Pull him down!" "Kill him!" Stretching out my arms like one in a dream who vainly wards off some evil, I struggled head-foremost to reach and rescue him. Then some one pulled me back, and the light went out of my eyes and I knew nothing more.

What followed was told me by Lord Howe, who carried me senseless into the street and then returned to help quell the tumult. The police at last fell upon the crowd and silenced

them. They slowly eddied out of the aisles, and Romney's wedding-day was over.

The truth was that Romney had received a letter delivered by a ragged child at the church door, as he waited anxiously for his bride.

"Noble friend," it ran, "be patient with me. Do not think me vile, who might to-morrow morning have been your wife if I had not loved you more than the name. Farewell, Romney,—let me write it this once,—my Romney."

There was much more of the letter, which told in a rambling way some things which Romney had never known. Marian had once, she said, tried to tell him how a certain woman had come to see her, but he only stared at the floor and paid no attention, and she was put off for that day. Then, afterwards, some one spoke so wisely of her and so tenderly of him, and urged her so earnestly to keep silence for his sake, that she finally decided to conceal it. Lady Waldemar, she said, was very kind, came nine or ten times to see her; and his cousin, too, was kindest of all. She had pondered over a certain thing his cousin had asked: "He loves you, Marian?" She had said it with a sort of mild and derisive sadness, much as a mother might say to her baby, "You'll touch that star, you think, little one?" And, she pathetically wrote, "I never touched it!" "God," the letter

continued, "if I could die and let these words break off innocent just here! But no; for your sake, here's the last: I could never be happy as your wife. Do not seek me nor vex yourself with lamentable thoughts over me; be sure I'm well, merry, and at ease, but a long way off. You'll find me in my grave sooner than elsewhere, and that's my choice. O my star, my saint, I am not so lost that I cannot thank you for all the good you tried to do me. My hand shakes, I am blind; I am poor at writing even at the best, and yet I've tried to make my g's as you showed me. Farewell! Say 'poor Marian now.'"

Romney searched for her many days and weeks, sifting over all the refuse of the town, but he found no trace of her. He would not hear me when I hinted that I knew a friend of his had reasons of her own for breaking the match. The lady had been ill ever since, the shock had been so severe to her. Something in his tone repressed me. He went on to say that, putting questions to Marian's fellow-lodgers, he found she had received another visitor beside Lady Waldemar and myself, a dubious overdressed woman who had dazed the children and thrown them some pence. This woman had been with her at first from week to week, but towards the end she came daily.

"I see all clearly enough," he said. "Such devils would pull the angels out of heaven if they could reach them. The slave who falls with disease on the Cairo streets warns the passengers to stand off, but these blotched souls are eager to spread infection."

"Some natures do not take plagues, though," I broke in to soothe him. "I believe, as I am a woman and understand womanhood, that Marian Earle, however lured away and deceived, still keeps pure in aim and heart."

"Pure in aim?" he said. "Oh, I grant that, like myself, who thought to shoulder the world and carry it over social ills, and yet have ended by letting a single soul slip by very impotence straight down to perdition; truly, she and I have reason to be proud of our aims! Poor child," he murmured, softly and reflectively, "it was a luckless day for her when she first chanced on my philanthropy."

"The best men, doing their best," I said, "know really the least of what they do. The most useful of men in the world are simply used. It is he alone who wields the hammer who sees the work advancing from the first blow. Take heart, cousin."

"Ah, if I could have taken yours, Aurora," he said. "But that's past now. Sing your songs, dear, if it's your way, but rest sometimes. Re-

flect that if art be the higher life, you still need the lower life to stand on in order to reach up to that higher. Remember, for art's sake, hold your life dear."

Then we parted. I respected him and understood the nobility of his sacrifices; but he supposed me too small a thing to comprehend him. "Sing," he seemed to say,—"sing, poor insect, if that's your way, and still tease me with your humming."

V.

It had been nearly two years since I saw Romney Leigh. I heard he was busy with many good works, had parted his estate into almshouses and gave lavishly of his bounty, and yet for two years I had not spoken with him.

It always makes me sad to go out into the world, and I felt even more sad than usual the night I went to Lord Howe's. He had a group of celebrities there amid the flaring lights; and his wife and they were very gracious to me. Lady Waldemar was there, and looked lovely with her twisted bronze tresses and her white shoulders. If the heart within were only half as white it would be well for her; but if it were, perhaps the breast would have been covered closer.

I overheard two men making comment on her beauty. One looked like a German student, and the other was called Sir Blaise Delorme.

"Look that way, Sir Blaise," said the younger man; "to the left, in red. She's Lady Waldemar whom Romney Leigh is soon to marry. You know him? One of our ablest men."

"Is Leigh our ablest man, then?" asked Sir Blaise, in mock surprise. "He's the one who was jilted by a pretty maid he adopted from the people. He seems now to have plucked a flower from the other side of the social hedge."

"A flower! a flower!" exclaimed the German student, with his eyes bent full upon her. He was twenty, certainly.

Sir Blaise resumed, with insinuating arrogance, "My young friend, I doubt your ablest man's power to get the least help for his schemes from a flowery creature like that."

"Beautiful!" the rapt student murmured. "See how she stirs, as if she were indeed a flower just touched by the breath of our talk."

Hereupon Grimwald, the bilious writer for the "Renovator," turned from a book of autographs with his low carnivorous laugh.

"A flower, of course," he said. "She neither sews nor spins, and takes no thought of her garments—falling off."

The student and Sir Blaise flinched, and both

drew back their chairs and pursued their talk without making a reply.

Lord Howe came up and overheard them.

"What! talking poetry so near the unfavoring Muse," he said, glancing gayly at me. "I've watched you half an hour, Miss Leigh, just as I've sometimes watched the Pallas in the Vatican. You remember the face, Sir Blaise? Intensely calm and sad, as if wisdom cut it off from fellowship."

Then as he came nearer to me, "I saw you across the room, and stayed to keep off the lion-hunters who were threatening you." He went on playfully to describe their terrors, until I smiled at his drollery.

"Ah, ah, you smile at last," said he. "But I swore to bring my transatlantic girl to you for a kiss,—not now, but some other day. We'll call it perjury; I'll give her up."

"No; bring her," I said.

"You make it hard to touch such goodness with a grimy palm. I meant to tease you, and so steel myself for telling you something that would tease you still more."

"Romney?" said I.

"No, no, nothing worse of Romney than what is already buzzed about. What I mean refers to you."

"Refers to me?"

"Me!" he echoed. "You sound it like a stone one drops down a dry well, forgetful of the toad at the bottom. Briefly, though, you know Eglinton, John Eglinton of Eglinton in Kent?"

"Is *he* the toad? He's, rather, like a snail, known by the house on his back. Divide them and you kill the man."

He answered, gravely, "A reputable man, an excellent landlord of the old stamp, kind to the aged poor who pick sticks at his hedgeside."

"Oh, tender-hearted landlord! may I take my long lease with him when the time arrives for gathering winter fagots!"

"He likes art, buys books and pictures—of a certain kind; he's a good son——"

"To an obedient mother," I laughed.

"Be less bitter, Miss Leigh," he said, "for, indeed, I have a letter which he so urged me to bring you I could not help yielding. He insists in it that a new love may gain much by passing through the hands of an old friendship."

"Love? My lord, I am past loving. I know only the rhyme for love,—and that's not love. Take your letter back."

"But you'll read it first?" he urged.

"I do not care to read it; it is stereotyped. The same thing he wrote to—anybody—Anne Blythe, the actress."

"My dear friend," he began, but I broke in hastily,—

"You mean me or your friend of Eglinton?"

"I mean you,—you," he answered, with some spirit. "A happy life involves prudent compromise. In this bad, twisted, topsy-turvy world of ours in England, where ledger-strokes and sword-strokes count for more than soul-strokes, it is hard to stand up for art. To be plain, my dear friend, you're poor except in what you so richly give us; and for art's sake, if for nothing else, I pray you to reflect."

I answered slowly, like a wayfaring man who finds himself too far from home at night and bears a steadfast face to the wind.

"Is art a less thing than virtue, that artists must cater to their ease and never think of the larger issues beyond? I will not bate one artist-dream on straw or down, my lord, nor cease to love high no matter how low I live."

So speaking, and with less anger than sorrow in my voice, I rose to go, while he, thrown back upon the noble shame of such natures, murmured the right words after having said the wrong ones.

As we passed on, Lord Howe insisting that his friendly arm should oar me across the stream eddying through the rooms, we came upon Lady Waldemar.

"Miss Leigh," she said, with a cold, bright smile, "I've tried to reach you all the evening. I've a world to tell you about your cousin's place in Shropshire, where I've been to see his work—our work,—you heard that I went? He looks well now; he has quite got over his unfortunate—— Ah, I know it moved you, tender-heart! As for Romney, it is sure he never loved her,—never. By the way, you have not heard of *her?* Quite out of sight and lost in every sense?"

She might have gone on talking half an hour. I put in "Yes" or "No" every now and then, till Lord Howe broke in:

"What penance for the wretch who interrupts the talk of charming women? I must brave it, anyhow. Pardon, Lady Waldemar, Miss Leigh is tired and unwell, and I've promised she should say no harder word this evening than 'Good-night.' Her face speaks the rest for her."

Then we went, and I breathed free and unrestrained once more at home; but the news I had heard had confirmed my lingering resolution to go to Italy. Having decided to sell some of the precious books inherited from my father, and leaving the disposal of them to my good Carrington in London, I set out without delay for Paris, where I intended to wait till he

should send me the proceeds of them as well as of my new book, which he had undertaken to dispose of to a publisher.

VI.

In Paris, one night, finding I could not sleep, I got up and went out in the early morning to wander through the Flower Market. As I paced absently back and forth, observing everything with an artist's eye, which always keeps on the shady side of the things it loves, I saw the crowd of young, vivacious, and black-braided heads dipping among the bouquets, and cheapening this and that in a cheerful twitter of speech. But as I walked on, my heart suddenly leaped in me, startled by a voice I had heard long before. Slowly and faintly, with long intervals between the words, it inquired in a stranger's French,—

"Would this be much, this branch of flowering mountain-gorse?"

"So much?" she said, when the price was given. "Too much for me, then."

She turned round so near me that I felt the sigh. I looked, and we were face to face.

"Marian! Marian!" I cried, "have I found you? Shall I let you go?" I held her slight wrists in mine. "Ah, Marian, can I let you go?"

She fluttered back from me like a flower in a sudden wind.

"Let me pass!" she said.

"I will not!" I replied. "I lost my sister Marian long ago, and sought her in my walks and in my prayers, and now I find her. Can I hurt you, dear? Then why distrust me? Don't tremble so. Come to my home with me, where we can talk and live with no one to vex us."

She shook her head: "You are as good as heaven itself,—as good as one I knew before,—but, farewell."

I loosed her hands: "In *his* name, no farewell!" She stood as if I still held her. "For his sake,—Romney's! By the good he meant, always, by the love he pressed for once, and by the grief and reproach that came instead——"

"He! Who grieved him?" she said, with an eager, questioning look. "Who had the heart to do it? What reproach could touch *him?* Be merciful! Speak quickly!"

"Come, then." I spoke with authority.

She said not a word, but in a gentle and humbled way turned and went with me.

We walked a mile or more, and then she stopped and asked if it was much farther.

"You are ill or tired?" I asked.

"No," she said; "there's one at home who has need of me by this time; I must not let him wait."

"In that case I will go with you," said I.

She led the way, and at last we stopped by a tall house in the ragged suburbs. I followed her up-stairs, and, on the landing, heard a woman come out and scold her for her delay. She just murmured a word of excuse, and shut out the rest with the chamber door.

It was a small square room, containing only two stools and a bed, and we were there alone. Marian threw off her bonnet and went to the bed, drawing a shawl softly away, and there on his back lay a young baby, warm with life to the very bottom of his dimples, to the ends of his lovely tumbled curls.

She leaned above him entirely forgetful of herself, and in her transport concentrating her whole passionate face, mouth, forehead, eyes, into one gaze. Then slowly, as he smiled, she smiled also, unaware that she did it, and drew a faint red to her countenance, as if it were a reflection of his.

"How beautiful!" she said.

"Yes, the child is well enough," I answered; "and if the mother's palms are clean, they should be proud to clasp such a child; but if not, I had rather lay my hands, were I she, on God's brazen altar-bars, red-hot with the fires of sacrifice, than touch those curls."

She plunged her fingers into his clustering

locks as if she would not be afraid of fire, and then with steady utterance said,—

"My lamb! my lamb! although through such as you the unclean once got approach to God, now you cannot, even with men, find enough grace for gentle words."

"But if a woman," I said, "is not bettered by being a mother, is not quickened towards truth and good, then she is no mother, although she dampens her baby's cheeks with kisses. We can kill roses so."

"Kill!" she said, turning a wild face from side to side. "What have you in your souls against me, all of you? Do you think I am wicked? God knows me, and trusts me with the child!"

"Not wicked," I said, "but forgetful of a wrong you have done, because you have been rewarded thus; which is a wrong beyond the first one, Marian. When you left the pure place and noble heart to take the hand of a seducer——"

"Whose hand? I took the hand of——" She sprang up erect and lifted the child at arm's-length above her. "By *him*, by his head and curls and blue eyes, which no woman born would dare to perjure herself on, I swear a mother's oath, that if I left that heart to lighten it, no cleaner maid than I ever took step to a sadder

end! Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn here in France? So with me; I was not seduced, but simply murdered."

She sank down and sat upon the bedside, and I, utterly broken and convicted, clung about her waist with a woman's passion, and kissed her hair and eyes.

"I have been wrong, sweet Marian, sweet, holy Marian," I said. "And now I'll use your oath: By the child, I swear his mother shall be innocent before my conscience. Innocent, my sister! Pardon me, pardon me, and smile a little, Marian!"

The poor lips just motioned for a smile and let it go. She spoke a few sad words about herself, and then asked me, half pleadingly, as if she had no right to know, to tell her about Romney. I took her head on my arm and stroked her cheeks, and told her all I could about him; how he had sought her and failed everywhere, and, broken-hearted, had withdrawn from the world. There I stopped.

"And now, how is it with him now?" she said, beseechingly.

I felt some shame that his grief had been so readily healed, and spoke with guarded words.

"Yes, I know," she said. "I had supposed that excluding me would bring in some one wor-

thier; and long before this, Lady Waldemar, he loved so——"

"Loved!" I started. "Loved her so! Now tell me."

"I will tell you; but since we are taking oaths, you will promise first that he in England shall never know?"

I assented, and she went on.

"I had loved on my knees," she said, "as others are accustomed to pray. I felt I was his for any of his uses, not my own at all. At first I did not question whether *he* was happy or if he loved me; I loved him so dearly I took it all for granted. But it broke on my slow senses that I might be out of place in the Eden I pictured to myself, and I began to see that I might bring ruin on the man I loved by loving him. Whose fault was it I should have such thoughts? Why, no one's. The light comes, and we are permitted to see. If I saw at last, the sense was in me, or else Lady Waldemar had spoken in vain."

"Oh, my prophet heart!" I cried aloud. "Then Lady Waldemar did speak?"

"Did she speak," Marian mused, softly, "or did she only suggest it? At least one thing's certain: from the day the gracious lady paid me the first visit I began to see things differently. She came much oftener than he knew,

and she bade me not to tell him she had been there, because she liked to love me even better than he could know. She was so kind. Once I broke out in tears, and asked her to give me counsel; had I erred in being too happy, and would she set me straight? She told me the truths I asked for. Romney could never love me even if he would,—that is, in the way men ought to love. He was set on wedding my class and acting out an opinion, and once married, so just a man could not help but make life for me as smooth as a marriage-ring; but how about *him?* She hesitated. It was hard for her to say the truth. It was plain, though, a man like Romney required a wife more on his own level. You take a pink and water it carefully and dig about its roots, but you can never change it to a heliotrope; the kind remains. Then, too, the harder truth: the tender heart which made him kind to the lower classes would be sensitive to the criticism of the higher. She made it very clear." Marian slowly rocked the baby, who was nearly asleep. "And I saw the whole thing plainly. Indeed, she told me, too, that she knew that Romney had once loved her, and she loved him, she might say, now the thing was forever over, but that, of course, he had never guessed it; and yet, though I stood between them, she said she loved me truly."

Did I laugh or curse? I sat there in silence hearing all double, Marian's tale and Romney's marriage-vow: "I'll keep to thee," which of course meant that woman-serpent.

"Lady Waldemar spoke more," said Marian, "but I heeded less because I suffered so. The generous lady tried to keep me from my resolution to leave Romney, and struggled hard to make my way clear to stay."

"Perhaps he is sliding the ring on that woman's finger now," I thought to myself as she spoke.

"But she failed to convince me," Marian continued; "and finding her willing to help me, I thought I could breathe freer away from England. She promised to place me under the protection of a woman who had once been her waiting-maid and who was about to sail for Australia, and so from day to day the woman came to visit me."

Suddenly Marian stopped speaking and sat erect, staring at me as if I had been a ghost.

"Does God make all sorts of creatures, do you really think?" she said. "It made me tremble if that woman touched my hand. I never liked her voice, and when she said a fondling word I shrank back from her. At last I spoke to Lady Waldemar and asked her if such a woman could be good to trust. She stroked my cheek and laughed. 'Foolish girl,' she said,

'your wits are wool-gathering; leave it all to me.' Well, the rest is short. I was obedient and wrote the letter to him, and then the woman took me off so dull and blind, not seeing by what road I went, and led me aboard a ship which might be bound for Sydney or France, I did not care which. The sea-sickness, the foreign shore; the shameful house, the night—there was no need to bring the drugged cup, and yet they brought it. Then at last I woke up as if I were in the grave. I was mad, and they feared my eyes and let me wander where I pleased out into the open country. The charitable peasants gave me food and twice tied a holy image about my neck. How heavy it seemed! I threw it in a ditch because it hindered my breathing; and the weeks passed on while I lived my old tramp-life over again. And then I sat one evening by the roadside, I, Marian Earle, myself, alone, undone, facing a sunset across the flats as if it were the end of time."

VII.

Marian told me her whole sad story down to the day on which she and I sat in her little attic room, and when she had finished, my heart and soul were with her against the world and all its conventions.

"Come with me, sweetest sister," I said.

"Henceforward you and I will stay together, and the boy will not miss a father, since he will have two mothers. I mean to go to the south, to my home in Tuscany, and there you shall go also."

She looked me in the face, but made no answer, nor did she thank me at all; only took up the sleeping child and held it out for me to kiss, as if to pay me richly and show that she trusted me.

Then we came to my lodging, and I placed the child and mother in the little room, where I could hear them breathing in their sleep. The next day we were off for Italy.

I thought much about writing to Romney of the revelations made to me by Marian, but I feared to disturb his peace if he really loved Lady Waldemar. Suppose, moreover, my letter should arrive too late? Would it be generous to pain the husband by exposing the vileness of the wife? No, I decided to keep her secret. Why agonize the man I loved—the *friend* I loved—by such news? It is strange how I listened as Marian told her story; not to her, but to a voice I had heard years ago among the garden trees. "Be my wife, Aurora," it had said to me, and I thought, Ah, if I had been the kind of a woman who could save a man through love, I might have saved Romney and

perhaps made a nobler poem than all those I've failed in since.

Well, how one weeps when one's over-weary! If a witness had been by he'd have said I loved my cousin, and yet,—who knows? But I put away the weakness before long and wrote some plain words to Lord Howe in England. I told him that Marian was found, and revealed to him Lady Waldemar's part in her flight, which he was to conceal from Romney unless the wedding had not yet taken place.

Then I wrote to Lady Waldemar, and poured out all the bitterness of my loathing; told her all, in bold and unhesitating words; but pledged myself to keep her secret to save him, solely to save *him*, from distress.

The next day we took train for Italy and fled southward amid the roar of steam, through which, to me at least, came constantly an echo of Romney's far-away wedding-bells.

In Florence, I found a house on the hill of Bellosguardo, which overlooked the city lying below in the valley. Many weeks passed quietly there, but no word came from England, until at last, one day, I received a letter from Vincent Carrington. He upbraided me for not acknowledging the receipt of his remittance, and told me among other news that he meant to marry my old friend Kate Ward. He then spoke of

my cousin Romney. He had been taken with a fever lately, and Lady Waldemar had tended him with the care and faithfulness of a household nurse. He said I was right about Lord Howe; he was a trump, and yet with cards like him in his hand Leigh could lose as he did!

The noonday seemed unusually stifling as I read. It was scorching in my room even with the sun shut out. The closed persiani threw long shadows on the floor and across the couch where I sat. The lines of the letter seemed blurred as I read.

"Well, he's married, that's clear," I mused, and threw open the blinds to let in some air; but the insufferable humming of the cicale grated on my senses and the sun seemed to blister my face. I brooded long over all that had happened in so brief a time, and through all dominating and coloring it, was the thought of Romney's marriage. The lady had nursed him when he was ill, mixed his drinks and tenderly watched him, and why should he not marry her? And yet the recent revelations I had heard, my knowledge of the woman, and my cousinly love for Romney,—all these feelings made it a pain to me, a haunting bitterness.

But the days went by, and gradually I took up the old Tuscan life, shorn though it was of the early halo of beauty. It seemed to me that

my new existence in the familiar land was like a book long ago dropped in the grass after reading it with some loving friend, and found in the autumn when the grass was dead and the friend gone. I lived tenderly and mournfully among the shadows of memory, seeing again the familiar creatures and flowers, but seeing them farther off and no longer mine. There was a gulf between us which I could not explain and could not cross. The birds were there, but I could no longer pair with them, and the sun seemed to forbid the dew from falling as I once knew it.

I rode out to our little house on the mountain-side, half expecting, somehow, to find my father still there; but all was changed, and I abruptly turned back. That was disappointment enough. I did not dare to visit my father's and mother's graves. I wished rather to think them visiting my grave—my life grave—there on the Florentine hills. Old Assunta was dead, too, and the land seemed to belong to the past. I, perhaps, was of the past also, only not in heaven like the rest.

One evening as I sat alone on the terrace around my tower, holding a book open on my knees, but only pretending to read, I was startled by Marian's laugh in the garden below. It sounded strangely, like the laugh of a sad and

innocent soul that was frightened by its own gayety. She looked up in sudden shame to have me hear her, and I dropped my eyes quickly on my book. It was Boccaccio's tale of the wooer who gave the sole thing that loved him as a sacrifice for love. Some of us do the same thing still, and never laugh again; but Marian had the right to laugh, because God himself and a little child were her partisans.

The night was approaching, and gradually the purple shadows had filled up the whole valley and covered the darkened city. The duomo bell struck ten, and a score of churches made answer. Some gas-lights trembled along the streets and in the squares. The outline of the Pitti palace was drawn in fire, and down past the quays, in the Maria Novella Place, where the mystic obelisks rise, was Buonarroti's Bride, that looks out from her dial eyes vainly seeking for his rich soul. I felt as if I had plunged into the midst of it all from my hill-side perch, it lay so clearly below me. Then, like one enthroned below the water, there stood my sea-king!

I felt rather than saw him. I rose up and sat down again, struggling for self-possession. I would have died for him, yet would not bate an inch of my full prerogative.

"You, Romney!" I said. "Lady Waldemar is here?"

"I have her letter; you shall read it presently," he replied, in a voice unlike his own. "I must first be heard a little. I have travelled far and waited so long for that."

I could not tell whether he touched my hand or only my sleeve. I trembled so much that I knew he must have touched me.

"Will you sit down?" I said, motioning to a chair; but he sank slowly down on the couch beside me instead.

"This is a great surprise, Cousin Romney," I said; "but everything is a wonder on these summer nights." And I motioned to the stars overhead.

"Then you do not know?" he said, softly.

"Yes, I know. Vincent Carrington sent me the news; but I did not suppose you would leave the work in England even for such a reason; though of course you'll make the holiday a work-day as well,—turn it to use for the Tuscan poor?"

"Carrington sent you the news?" he echoed. "And did he give his personal news?"

"Yes; the whole world over there seems to be crumbling into marriage. I think he has chosen very wisely."

"Do you think so, and is it possible at last?" he said. Then, as if musing to himself, he added: "Well, the knowledge could scarcely have

changed the case for me, and what has happened is surely best for her."

"What," I thought, "he loves Kate Ward now, because he is married to Lady Waldemar!" Then I said, quietly,—

"I did not think you knew Kate Ward, Cousin Romney."

"I never did," he said. "It is enough that Vincent did, and chose to marry her." Then turning to me abruptly: "You did not get a letter from Lord Howe, a month back, Aurora?"

"No!" I said, in some surprise.

"I felt it was so," he replied, "and yet it is certainly strange. Did Sir Blaise Delorme pass through Florence?"

"Yes. I saw him in Our Lady's Church; just a glimpse; he did not see me. But why did Lord Howe prefer him to the post?"

"Well, there were facts to tell. Howe supposed—but no matter. You heard the news from Carrington, yet you would have been less startled to see me, Aurora, if you had read the letter."

"Dear Romney," I began, "it did not use to be necessary for you to have precoursers to spread carpets before you when you came. Yet I'm sorry to lose so famous a letter. Doubtless I've missed a deal of London gossip by the misfortune, for Lord Howe writes charmingly."

He made no direct reply, only said, abruptly, "Marian's well?"

I bowed my head. It was hard to speak of her to Lady Waldemar's husband. How much did he really know? He seemed not to take the hint, however, but repeated,—

"Marian, is she well?"

"She's well," I said, for she was there in sight but an hour back, though the night had now brought her in-doors, where I could hear her in the upper room singing the child to sleep.

"Here?" he asked.

"Yes, here," said I.

He stopped and sighed: "Well, we must drop that for the time. I have another thing to speak about, and I must be alone with you to say it."

"Say it now," I said; "she will not vex you." He suddenly turned his face full on me and smiled, as if to crush me.

"I have read your book, Aurora."

"Well, then, you have read it and I have writ it," replied I, "and let us have done with it. And now for the rest——"

"The rest is just like the first," he said, "for the book has stolen into my heart, lives in me, dreams in me."

I replied, with a touch of bitterness, "It lived in me before it lived in you, and I know better

how foolish and feeble it is, how unworthy of such words."

"The poet always looks beyond his book," he said, earnestly, "but this special book seems to stand above me and draw me up to it. It may be that it is not so high, but I so low."

I answered vaguely, and he taxed me with inattention.

"I'm thinking," I said, "of a certain June day when you and I talked of life and art, while both of us were untried in either. It was my birthday, and was morning then, while now it is night."

"And now night," he repeated, absently.

"I'm thinking," I resumed, "that if I had known on that dewy morning my cousin Romney could ever say such words of a book of mine, it would have pleased me better to hope for them than it can be even now to hear them."

"True," he said again; "it is night."

"And there are the stars," I added, lightly. "Let's talk of stars, not books."

But he murmured again "night," and seemed not to hear me. At last he broke out in a low voice,—

"I have come to you, Aurora, just to breathe out my soul before I humbly go away forever, like a punished child into a corner."

"Wisely, cousin," I said, "and worthily of both of us."

"Yes, worthily," he continued; "for this time I mean to confess that I, who felt the world tugging at me for help as if there was no other to do the work, that I, to-night, know myself for just what I was on that June day. You were young, Aurora, but you spoke the truth; while I—well, I built up follies that shut the sunshine away from my face."

"Speak wisely, Cousin Leigh," I said.

"Yes, but too late, dear Aurora," he replied. "I was heavy and stupid then, and heard the cries of misery so close that I never distinguished the sound of angel-wings in the air. The world seemed one great famishing mouth, and I was put there to supply it with bread, nothing more."

"Ah, you are sad to-night, cousin," I said. "Did all your labors at Leigh Hall really come to naught?"

"All to naught," he said, half smiling at his discomfiture. "They broke my windows; and I was shot at once or twice, but escaped injury. Finally they set fire to the Hall and burned it to the ground. You have never heard, then? Vincent could not have sent all the news."

"They did?" I cried; "they actually burnt Leigh Hall?"

"You're sorry, Aurora! Yes, they did it com-

pletely, a thorough piece of work; no failure there!"

"Then I shall never again see the old chimneys from my little window?"

"No more," he said. "If you should climb the hills now you would come to a great charred circle, with a single stone stairway in its midst winding up to nowhere, just like my life."

I did not make any answer. Had I a right to sympathize with this man, between whose soul and mine stood another woman? The silence lengthened till it grew oppressive. Then I spoke to keep from stifling.

"I think you were ill afterwards?"

"Yes," he said; "but unluckily I failed to die, just as I have always failed to live, and thus, having tried all other ways, I resolved to trust in God's way. We make up our virtues so often out of threadbare sins. Is it right, for instance, to wed here while you love there? But if a man sins once, the sin so sticks to him that if he does not sin to damn himself, he sins to damn others with himself, thus to wed here while loving there becomes a duty. But she is certainly my true wife, poor lamb, poor child; and yet, Aurora, it is cruel to vex you any more now; having said what I came to say, I will try to please you. She shall have all that is needful for her and hers: protection, ten-

der liking, freedom, ease. They'll make small amends for the hideous evil she would have escaped but for me, and for this loss of a gracious friend, which she must also forfeit for my sake——"

Here he stopped and reached out his hand. I looked up, and he said,—

"Drop your hand for a moment in mine, sweet; we're parting now."

I timidly touched his fingers.

"What a touch!" he said. "You grudge me a parting hand-shake? Are you angry because I could not bear even *you* living side by side with one I called my wife? Do not be so cruel, Aurora; you must understand me. Your lightest footfall would shake my whole house. It is night henceforth with me, and I put up the shutters against Auroras."

He smiled feebly, with his hand stretched sideways towards me, and, rising, I wondered if he had gone mad under stress of his suffering. I spoke quietly with a tremulous pride:

"Go, cousin; a farewell was sooner spoken in those old days than seems now to suit you. I wish you well. I'm sorry for the trials you've had, not only for your sake, but mankind's. We can never shift our places as dear friends—no, do not interrupt me; but, as you said, we are parting. More than once to-night you've un-

deservedly mocked me, and I am much surprised. So far as I am concerned, Romney, you will owe your wife no amends. She has not held so fast to my gown that you will have to entreat her to let go. The lady never was a friend of mine, so, rest content, I'll never intrude upon your happiness; you need not put up the shutters to keep out Auroras. My larks fly higher than some people's windows. It would indeed shake your house if I came with an outstretched hand warm from the clasp of one—of one we know—to acknowledge as mistress there a Lady Waldemar."

"Now God be with us!" he interrupted, with a sudden clash of voice. "What name's that, Aurora?"

"Pardon me," I said, "I hope I may name your wife without wounding you."

"Are you mad?" he cried. "Wife! Mine! Lady Waldemar!" He threw his noble head back and laughed with a sort of helpless scorn, while I stood and trembled.

"May God judge me!" he said at last. "I stand convicted and sorely humbled. I came because you had shown me from your own soul a glimpse of true light; because, too, I had formerly wronged you, and have ever since by my arrogance, though I loved you best, as is written plainly in the book of my misdeeds. I

came here, I say, to abase myself, and fasten the garland on brows whence I had once wrongfully plucked it. But here again I am baffled. There's no room left for me at the feet of any woman who misconceives my nature, purpose, possible actions. Ah, Aurora, you've left your height and we take hands on my level. I reach down to forgive you, sweet, and that's a fall. Men have burnt my house, maligned my motives, but not one, I swear, has wronged my soul as you have, who can call Lady Waldemar my wife!"

"Not married to her!" I cried. "Yet you said——"

"Again? But read; she sent you this through me!"

He held out a letter, and I mechanically took it from him.

VIII.

Lady Waldemar's letter was one of ill-hidden hatred. She told me in sentences made to sting, but subtly woven with courtesy, how she envied and loathed me. She told me, too, what it was more interesting and novel for me to learn, that, having nursed Romney through his illness, and exercised her most winning allurements on him, yet she had found him unyielding, and at last abandoned the pursuit. He had asked her,

as he grew better, to read from my book to him, which she had done with the best grace possible; but it was an unpalatable task after her months of self-sacrifice, and she resolved that next time he should find another reader. She triumphed over us both, she said, and abruptly left him. When she next saw him, she had read my letter and her own heart as well. He went with Lord Howe to thank her, but she received them with coolness, and asked his pardon for having been so unwise as to love him. She was quite cured of the malady by that time. Then she told him her version of Marian's story, which she repeated in this letter to me, and which touched with less sombre tints the details of the cruel plot, throwing new suspicion on Marian to excuse her own part in it. She heaped some vindictive words on me at the close of her letter, and ended by avowing a bitter hatred, even cursing me for having defrauded her of love.

When I had done reading, I stood there in the moonlight by Romney's side confused and deeply wounded. I had caught the sense of the letter in a momentary glance through it.

"Ah, not married?" I said.

"You mistake," he answered, softly. "I am married. Is not Marian Earle my wife? As God sees things, I have a wife and child; and as I honor God, I am here to claim them!"

It was difficult to get my breath and harder still to speak.

But some one else had come there to speak for me.

"Romney! my good angel, Romney!" she said, in an ardent whisper.

Then for the first time I knew that Marian Earle was beautiful. She stood like a pale saint in an ecstasy,—as if the moonlight streamed between her feet and the earth and raised her up upon its steady rays.

"I left my child asleep," she said, "and was drawn here by your voices. I heard your last words,—friend! Confirm me now. You take this Marian just as she is for your honorable wife?"

He stretched out his arms towards her thrilling voice, as if to draw it into an embrace.

"I take her as God made her and as men have failed to unmake her, for my honored wife."

She neither raised her eyes nor moved.

"You take this Marian's child, which is also her shame, in sight of men and women, for your own child, of whom you will never feel ashamed?"

He stepped towards the proud and pathetic voice, still with outstretched arms, as if he desired to quench it upon his breast.

"May God so father me and so forsake me as I do Marian's child whom here I take in all things as my own."

Then she turned slowly towards me: "And you,—will you blame me very much? What if I take this hand stretched out to us as a grace and protection for him? I will be bound by what you say."

She spoke in a low, passionless voice as one in authority, not lowly Marian Earle.

"Accept the gift, say I, sister Marian, and be satisfied there's a soul behind the hand that will never quail for having given, no matter what the world babbles. Here's my hand, too, to clasp yours; and, as I'm a woman and a Leigh, I vow that Romney is honored in his choice."

Her broad, wild, woodland eyes shot out a rapturous light.

"Thank you, my great Aurora!" And she sprang forward, dropping her impassioned head with all its brown curls like a spaniel on Romney's feet. We heard the kisses drawn through her sobs.

"Oh, Romney, oh, my angel, unchanged, though I have passed through the grave since we parted! Death itself could only change you, not make you better!"

When he tried vainly to raise her to his arms, she leaped like a fawn and alighted beyond his

reach. She stood there with her great eyes and dripping cheeks, and shook her head as if to keep down some rising thoughts. Then, after a pause, she said,—

"But, Romney, if one who loved you as I once loved is dead and gone away where there is no wedlock, will she ever be able to revive and wed you now? You'll see it plainer afterwards. It is fated that you and I must never, never join hands. Do not think I speak from a false humility. I have come to learn through the long nights that a woman, poor or rich, honored or despised, is a human soul. I know you'll not be angry, Romney, when I tell you the truth. Yet truly, I do not love you. Did I once, or did I only worship? I never questioned. I never thought to be anything but your slave. I was wholly yours; but that was before I heard my child cry in the desert night. For me, the ghost of Marian loves no more,—nothing, except the child. I could not bear to see him on a good man's knee. I swear, that if I loved you like some I know,—for eyes that weep see clearly—yet I've no room for more children in my arms; my kisses are all melted on one mouth. As for you, wed a noble wife, and open your great souls upon each other. If I dared reach towards her in her upper sphere and bid her come down to you, I should be full

of joy. But I dare not,—though I guess her name. I remember how vexed you were in the old days when some one came or did not come. I could touch her now, but I fly because I dare not do it."

She was gone. He smiled so sternly that I hastened to speak.

"Forgive her," I said; "she sees clearly what is best for herself. Her instinct is holy."

"I forgive," he said. "I only marvel that she sees so surely, while others——" Here he paused, then hoarsely and abruptly went on: "Aurora, can you forgive her and me? You know she loves you well, while for me—if I have once or twice let my heart escape to-night, remember we're parting!" Then again he broke through his assumed repose and cried, passionately, "O love, I have loved you! O my soul, I have lost you! But I swear, I am not so base as to regret that June morning or this night which is still fair to you. Not so blind, Aurora; I protest, that, by those stars which I cannot see——"

"You cannot, Romney?"

"—that, if Heaven itself should remix the lots and give me another chance I'd say, 'No other!' Aurora never must be my wife."

"Not see the stars?" I repeated.

"It is worse still, dear, not to see your hand,

although we are parting. Let me hold it a moment before I go, and understand my last words. I would not have you think when I'm gone that I dared to hanker for your love and wished to use it as a dog, to help a stumbling blind man. God forbid! Believe me, dear, if I had known what loss was to come upon me, I would have done as well as He has who kept your eyes wide for my faults. Farewell, then, you who are still my light. It is very late, I know that, now. You've been too patient, sweet. I will blow my whistle out towards the lane, and the one who brought me will come. Go in. Good-night."

"Wait a moment," I cried. "It cannot, cannot be true! I hold your hands, look into your face,—you see me Romney, surely?"

"No more than the blessed stars," he said. "You tremble, dear Aurora. The same dear, soft heart as always. It was this that grieved me,—Howe's letter never reached you, then? You had heard of my illness, but not all, not of the sudden revulsion in the burning house, the strain of body and soul which almost turned my blood to fire, and then the falling beam that struck me on the forehead as I passed the gallery-door with my burden? I hope it may have fallen accidentally, but I dread to think it was tilted my way by Marian's father, whom I had found and tried to tame. But not a word

to her! He laughed, and neither of us supposed the wound so deep; but——"

"Blind, Romney?"

"You'll learn to say it cheerfully, Aurora. I desponded a little at first,—it seemed hard——"

"No hope?" I asked.

"Do not cry, Aurora. I feel your tears on my hand. Yes, there's hope,—not of sight, the visual nerve is withered. But the man who was once so restless and ambitious to renovate the world is now contented. My personal loss has made me hopeful for others who lose. I've come to a happier faith. I find we gain through compensation. I am as tender for the suffering world as of old, but quieter; more willing to learn. Surely there's still hope, Aurora."

"Is there hope for me, too,—for me? If I came and said what a woman should not say,—pride lingers, you know, till we break our hearts against it,—if I said,—I love—I love you, Romney!"

"Silence!" he exclaimed. "A woman's pity may make her mad; but a man must not cheat his soul to betray it. It is hard, though!" Then sadly turning, "Farewell, Aurora."

"But I love you, Romney; and when a woman says she loves, the man to whom she says it must hear her, even if he does not love her, for which—hush, you shall answer in your

turn—she will not blame him. As for me, you call it pity and generosity, and it would be easier for a proud spirit like mine to let it pass for that. But, no matter, the truth must come out. I must be humble. No, my love is no mere pity. I am not generous,—never was, or else I should never have grudged so much your power to give. I would take no gifts from any one but God, and meant to use them as I chose. You admit you were wrong, Romney; but I was wrong too in most things: I exalted the artist in me at the expense of the woman. Now I know that art is much, but love is much more. Oh, Romney, I am changed since then, saving in one thing, that is, I love you, loved you first and last and will forever. They knew it, Lady Waldemar and Marian, and I might have known it too if I had been more honest. You, dear, mistook the world, but I mistook my own heart, and that was fatal. Will you leave me here, then, Romney, so wrong, and proud, a mere inconsolable woman?—and I love you so, I love you, Romney——"

I could scarce see his face for weeping, and I know not whether I dropped against his breast or felt his arms first about me. Was it my cheeks that were hot and overflowed with tears, or his? There were words between us that seemed to melt apart in the utterance, and a

long embrace; then a kiss, silent as the waiting night, and deep shuddering breaths that meant all that voice or kiss could not mean. I have tried to write down what he said; but if an angel should speak in thunder, should we know anything saving that it thundered? I only know that he loved me to the depth and height of his large nature, and that I returned his love.

I lifted my hand in his, and he turned instinctively towards the eastern hills, where the first foundations of that new day which should be built out of heaven to God were being laid in jasper-stone clear as glass. He stood with erect brows a moment in silence as one who gazed into the distance, and fed his majestic blind eyes upon the thought of the perfect noon to come. When I saw his soul saw,—

"Jasper first, Romney," I said; "sapphire, second; chalcedony, third; and the rest in order; last, an amethyst."

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

THE earliest gray of morning was stealing up from the east, and with it rose the fog out of the broad river Oxus. The Tartar camp, which lay along the banks of the stream, was still hushed in sleep, but Sohrab alone of all the host was stirring. He had tossed wakefully upon his bed of mats through the long night, and when the first light of morning stole into his tent, he rose and clad himself and put on his sword, then took his horseman's cloak and went out into the fog, and through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.

The black Tartar tents stood like a cluster of bee-hives on the flat shore of the Oxus, and Sohrab passed through them to a hillock a little back from the water. Once the place had been crowned with a clay fort, but it had fallen into ruin now, and there the Tartars had built a shelter for Peran-Wisa. It was a dome of laths with felts spread over it, and inside were thick-piled carpets.

When Sohrab entered, he found the old man asleep on his bed of rugs with his weapons laid near at hand. Peran-Wisa heard him, though his step was dulled by the carpets. He rose quickly on one arm.

"Who are you?" said he. "It is not yet clear dawn, and I cannot see. Is there news, or a night-alarm?"

Sohrab went up to his bedside.

"You know me, Peran-Wisa. It is I. The sun is not yet up, and the foe are still asleep. I lay wakeful all night long, so I have come to you. In Samarcand, before we marched, King Afrasiab bade me ask your counsel, and heed you as if I were your son. Now I need your aid. Have I not served Afrasiab truly since I first came among the Tartars from Ader-baijan? Have I not shown the courage of a man in my boyish years? You know, too, while I bear on the conquering Tartar ensigns and beat back the Persians, that I am always seeking my father, Rustum, who, I hope, may one day greet me on a well-fought field. Yet I can never find him. Now hear what I ask, and grant it to me, for I have it much at heart. To-day let the two armies rest; but I will challenge the bravest Persian lords to meet me, man to man. If I prevail, Rustum will hear of it; if I fall, the dead claim no kin, and all's well."

Peran-Wisa took the young warrior's hand in his and sighed.

"What an unquiet heart is yours, Sohrab! Why cannot you rest among the Tartar chiefs and share the common chance with us who love you? If the one desire rules all, seek Rustum in peace, not in war. Carry an unwounded son to his arms. But you must look far from here. He is not here. When I was young it was different. Then Rustum was in the front of every fight. But now, either because he is growing old or has quarrelled with the Persian king, he sits at home in Seistan with his father Zal. There, go now! What, you will not? Ah, my heart forebodes danger to you on the field; but who can keep the lion's cub from ravening? I grant what you ask, Sohrab, but I had rather send you away in peace to seek your father."

He dropped the youth's hand and rose from his bed, drawing his woollen coat on his chilly limbs. Then he tied on his sandals, threw a white cloak about him, took up his ruler's staff and sheepskin cap, and, raising the tent-curtain, called his herald to his side and went abroad.

By this time the sun had risen and cleared the fog from the river, and the Tartar horsemen were filing from their black tents into the open plain. First went the King's guard, with black sheepskin caps and long spears. They

were large men, mounted on large steeds. Next the southern Toorkmuns, the Tukas, the lances of Salore, and those from Attruck,—light men, on light horses. After these came a swarm of wandering riders from far off, and owning doubtful service: Tartars of Ferghana with scanty beards and close-set skull-caps; wild hordes from the northern wastes; Kalmucks and wandering Kirghizzes upon shaggy horses from Pamere.

The Persians were forming on the other side. First, a light cloud of horse; then, behind these, the royal Persian troops, both horse and foot, in burnished armor.

Down through the Tartar squadrons old Peran-Wisa, with his herald, came slowly to the front, keeping back the foremost ranks with his staff; and when Ferood, the leader of the Persians, saw this, he took his spear and also came to the front, checking his ranks where they stood. Then Peran-Wisa came out upon the sand between the silent armies.

"Ferood, and you, Persians and Tartars, hear!" said he, in a clear, commanding voice. "To-day let there be a truce between us, and choose you a champion among the Persian lords to fight Sohrab, our champion, man to man."

A thrill of hope and pride ran through the

Tartar squadrons, for they loved Sohrab and gloried in his prowess.

But the Persians were stricken with fear, and Ferood's brother-chiefs, Gudurz, Zoarrah, and Feraburz, came up to counsel with him.

"Ferood," said Gudurz, "we must take up this challenge, but what champion have we to match Sohrab? He has the foot of the wild stag and a lion's heart. Yet Rustum came hither last night, and has sullenly pitched his tents behind the camp. Let me go to him and carry this Tartar challenge and the young warrior's name. He may forget his anger and stand forth in our defence."

"Old man," cried Ferood across to Peran-Wisa, "be it as you say. Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man to meet him."

Then Peran-Wisa strode back through the opening squadrons, and Gudurz ran through the ranks of anxious Persians, and crossed the camp to Rustum's tents out on the sand. They were of scarlet cloth. The high pavilion in the centre was Rustum's, and there Gudurz found him, still at the table, though he had finished his morning meal. Before him was a side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread, and dark-green melons; but he sat listlessly playing with a falcon perched on his wrist. Gudurz went up and stood before him, and presently Rustum

saw him, and sprang forward with a cry, dropping the bird, and greeting him with both hands.

"Welcome! These eyes could not see a better sight. What news? But sit down first, and eat and drink."

Gudurz stood impatiently in the tent door. "Not now," he said; "a time will come for that, but not to-day. Other needs press. The armies are drawn out. A challenge has come from the Tartars to choose a champion from among us to fight their champion. You know his name,—he is called Sohrab, but his birth is hidden. His might is like yours, Rustum. He has the wild stag's foot and the lion's heart. He is young, and Iran's chiefs are either too old or too weak to meet him. Come down and help us, or we shall be shamed."

Rustum smiled disdainfully.

"If Iran's chiefs are old," he said, "I am older. If the young are weak, the King has erred, for he himself is young and honors younger men, letting us who are old moulder to our graves. He loves me no more, but loves the young, and they may answer Sohrab, not I. What do I care that his fame is great? Would I had such a son myself, and not a helpless girl such as I have,—a brave and famous son to send to war, while I might tarry with aged Zal, my father,

who is vexed yearlong by the Afghan robbers, and has no one to guard his weak old age."

"But what will be said, Rustum," replied Gudurz, "when Sohrab dares our bravest to fight, and seeks you most of all, and yet you hide your face? Take heed, or it may be thought that you hoard your fame, and fear to try your strength with a younger man."

"What is one more or less, famous or obscure, valiant or craven, to me? Who would do great deeds for unworthy men? But come, you shall see how I hoard my fame; yet I will fight unknown, and in plain arms."

Gudurz turned and ran back through the camp, and Rustum strode to his tent door and called in his followers, bidding them bring his arms. He clad himself in plain arms; his shield had no device, and his helm, inlaid with gold, held in its fluted spine a plume of scarlet horsehair. Thus armed, Rustum came from his tent, and his horse, Ruksh, followed like a hound behind him. He was a bright bay, with a lofty crest and a saddle-cloth of embroidered green crusted with gold. Rustum crossed the camp and came in sight of the Persian hosts, who hailed him with shouts of welcome; but the Tartars did not know him in his undecorated mail.

Rustum advanced to the Persian front; and

Sohrab, who had armed himself in Haman's tent, came forward through his followers, who opened for him as the grain opens before the wide swaths of a reaper. On either hand were squares of men with bristling spears, and in their midst ran down an open way to the front. As Rustum came forth upon the sand he cast his eye towards the Tartar tents and saw Sohrab also advance.

The old warrior curiously eyed the presumptuous youth who had defied the Persian chiefs. He gazed long at him, admiring his spirited air and wondering who he was. He seemed very youthful, and tenderly reared; tall, dark, and straight like a young cypress. A deep pity entered Rustum's soul as he beheld him coming, and, raising his hand, he beckoned to him.

"Take heed, young man," he called; "the air of heaven is soft and very pleasant, but the grave is cold. Mark me! I am mighty and clad in iron. I have stood on many a field of blood and fought many a foe: never was that field lost or that foe saved. Why, Sohrab, will you invite death? Be governed by me; quit the Tartar host and come to Iran. Be my son, and fight under my banner till I die. There are no youths in Iran as brave as you."

Sohrab heard the deep voice and saw the giant figure, which stood like a tower on the

sand. He saw, too, the head streaked with gray hairs, and a new hope came to his soul. He ran forward and embraced the champion's knees and took his hand.

"Oh, by my father's head, by your own soul, are you not Rustum? Speak! are you not he?"

Rustum eyed him askance and turned away, wondering within himself what the young fox might mean. These Tartar boys, he thought, are wily and false. If I confess what he asks and say I am Rustum, he will not yield, nor quit our foes, but he will find some pretext for not fighting, perhaps praise my fame and offer me gifts. Then when he is feasting some day in King Afrasiab's hall he will say, I once challenged all the Persian lords to meet me in single fight; but only Rustum, among them, dared to come forth. Then he and I exchanged gifts on equal terms and parted. This is what he will say, and his countrymen will applaud him, while the Persian chiefs will be shamed through my weakness.

Thus reflecting, the old warrior looked down and said,—

"Rise! Why do you vainly ask for Rustum? I am here whom you have called. Make your boast good, or yield. Is it solely with Rustum you would fight? Men look on his face and flee."

Sohrab rose to his feet: "You cannot frighten me. I am no girl, to be made pale by words. No, Rustum is far away, and we stand here. You are vaster, and are proven, and I am young; but success sways with the breath of heaven!"

Rustum made no answer, but hurled his spear mightily down from his shoulder. Sohrab watched it coming, and, quick as a flash, sprang aside. The spear hissed by him and went quivering into the sand, which it sent flying far and wide.

Sohrab threw in turn, and struck Rustum's shield. The iron plates rang sharp, but turned the point. Rustum seized his club, a huge unlopped trunk that he alone could wield, and, lifting it, struck fiercely at Sohrab, but the youth sprang aside, lithe as a glancing snake, and the club came thundering on the earth, where it leaped from Rustum's hand, who followed it and fell to his knees.

Sohrab might now have unsheathed his sword and pierced his foe where he lay buried in the sand, but he looked on, smiling, and courteously drew back.

"You strike too hard," he said. "Rise, and be not angry. When I look upon you, wrath quite forsakes my soul. You are not Rustum, you say? Who are you, then, that can so touch

me? Boy as I am, I, too, have seen battles, and waded foremost in their bloody waves. But never before has my heart been so deeply touched. Old warrior, let us yield to heaven. Come, let us plant our spears here in the sand and make a truce."

While he spoke, Rustum had slowly risen, and now stood erect, trembling with rage. He left his club where it had fallen, but regained his spear. The dust had soiled his stately crest and dimmed his arms; his breast heaved, and a light foam came upon his lips. Twice he tried to speak, and twice was choked with rage.

"You girl, nimble of foot, not of hand!" he stammered. "You curled dancer, now fight! No more words! You are not in Afrasiab's gardens with the Tartar girls, but on the Oxus sands, and in the dance of battle, with one who makes no play of war, but fights it out hand to hand."

Then Sohrab drew his sword, and they rushed together. Their shields clanged, and a great din of rattling strokes arose. The heavens seemed to take part in the conflict, for a cloud grew suddenly in the sky and darkened the sun over their heads, and a wind rose and swept the sand into a mist that wrapped them about, and concealed them from the hosts on either hand, over whom the sky was still unclouded. They

fought on in the gloom with bloodshot eyes and laboring breath. First Rustum struck Sohrab's stiffly-held shield. The steel spear rent the tough plates, but failed to penetrate to the skin. Rustum plucked it back with a groan of disappointment. Then Sohrab smote Rustum's helm with his sword, but did not pierce it through, though he shore away the proud horse-hair plume, which never until now had been defiled. Rustum bowed his head at the blow; and then the gloom grew blacker, thunder rumbled in the air and lightning began to gleam, and Ruksh, the horse, who stood near, uttered an unearthly cry. The two hosts heard the cry, and quaked with terror. Sohrab heard it, too, but he did not quail. He rushed on, and struck again, and again the old warrior bowed his head; but this time Sohrab's blade sprang into a thousand splinters and the hilt alone remained in his hand.

Rustum raised his head. His dreadful eyes glared, and he shook on high the menacing spear. Then he shouted "Rustum!"

Sohrab heard the shout and shrank back. He scanned the advancing form with blinking eyes. Then he stood bewildered, and dropped his shield, and the spear pierced his side.

He reeled, and, staggering back, sank to the ground. The cloud dispersed and the wind

fell, and the sun came out again. The two armies could see the pair,—Rustum standing safe upon his feet and Sohrab lying on the bloody sand.

Rustum smiled bitterly. "Sohrab," he said, "you thought to kill a Persian lord to-day; to strip his corpse and carry the trophies to King Afrasiab's tent; or else that the great Rustum himself would come forth, and that your wiles would induce him to take your gifts and let you go, so that all the Tartar host would praise your craft and courage, and your fame would delight your father in his old age. Fool, you yourself are slain, and by an unknown man!"

"Unknown you are," said Sohrab, with a fearless mien; "yet your fierce boast is in vain. You do not slay me; Rustum and my filial heart slay me. If I were what till to-day I have been, and were matched with ten like you, they should be lying here and I standing there. But the well-loved name unnerved my arm. And yet there is something in yourself, I confess, which troubles my heart, and made my shield fall. Your spear pierced an armless foe. But, hear me, and tremble to hear: Rustum shall yet avenge my death!—Rustum, my father, whom I have sought through the whole world!"

"Rustum! Father! What talk is this? Rustum never had a son."

Sohrab's voice had weakened with each utterance, and now as he tried to speak it nearly failed him.

"Ah, yes, he had, for I am that son. One day the news will reach him where he sits and tarries long, very far away from here. It will pierce him like a stab to know my fate. He will leap to arms and cry for vengeance on you, —vengeance for an only son. Remember what that will be! But I pity my mother most. She lives in Ader-baijan with her father, the old King, who grows gray with age and rules over the valiant Koords. Ah, I pity her, who will never again see Sohrab come home with spoils and honor from the Tartar camp!"

Rustum was plunged deep in thought. He did not believe Sohrab was his son, though he called up names he well knew. He had had sure tidings, he thought, that the child born to him was a puny girl. He did not know that the sad mother had sent him false news for fear he would seek the boy and train him up in arms. He thought as he stood there by the youth's side, watching the agony of his death, that Sohrab made a false boast of being his son, or that the name had been given him to swell his fame.

As the shepherd at dawn sees some far-away bright city through the rolling clouds, so Rus-

tum saw his own youth, and Sohrab's mother, and the old King, her father, who loved his wandering guest so well that he joyously gave him his fair child for a wife. Happy glimpses of the life the three together had once lived in that long-distant summer-time came to him: the castle, the dewy woods, the hunt and hound, and the sunrise on the lovely hills of Ader-baijan. Then he gazed anew on the slaughtered boy, of likely age and face to be his own son.

"Oh, Sohrab," he cried, piteously, "you are indeed such a son as Rustum, were you his, would have loved! But you err, for Rustum had no son. He had one child, but a girl, who is with her mother now, and never dreams of war."

Then Sohrab spoke angrily, for life ebbed fast and he was eager to prove his birth.

"Who are you, to deny my words? Truth sits on the lips of dying men. Listen: I bear here on my arm the seal which Rustum gave to my mother to prick upon her babe."

The blood rushed to Rustum's cheeks, and his mail-clad knees shook. He smote his ringing breast with one hand and pressed the other against his heart.

"Show me," he said; "for that is a proof which cannot lie."

With weak and hasty fingers Sohrab undid

his belt and bared his arm near the shoulder. There, pricked in faint vermilion, was the tell-tale sign. It was a picture of the griffin which of old reared Zal, Rustum's father, who was left to die on the mountains.

"How do you say?" asked Sohrab. "Is that Rustum's sign, or another's?"

Rustum gazed at it long and intently without a word. At last he uttered a sharp cry of self-reproach: "Oh, boy! your father!"

He choked, and a dark cloud came upon his eyes, and he sank down on the sand.

Sohrab crawled up to him and threw his arms about his neck, kissing his lips passionately and stroking his cheeks with weakening fingers, in his eagerness to bring him back to life.

Presently Rustum opened his eyes wide with horror. He seized the dust with both hands and threw it on his head, and smirched his glittering armor. Then he clutched his sword and would have taken his own life; but Sohrab divined his thought, and held his hands with all his feeble strength.

"Forbear, father!" he cried. "The doom I meet to-day was written down long ago, and you are only the unconscious hand of heaven. My heart cried out that it was you when I first saw you, and your heart spoke also; I knew it. Fate trod the promptings down with its iron

heel. But I have found my father, and what does it matter? Come, sit here beside me on the sand and take my head between your hands, kiss my cheeks and wash them with your tears; and, father, say 'My son' to me. Quick, for my sands of life are ebbing away."

Sohrab's pleading voice touched the old warrior's heart, and insensibly the tears came into his eyes. He threw his arms around his son's neck and wept aloud.

An awe fell on both the armies when they saw Rustum's grief, and the horse, Ruksh, with his head bowed to the ground and his mane sweeping the dust, come near. He moved first to the one, then the other, as if trying to understand their grief. The big warm tears rolled down from his eyes and caked the sand. Rustum cried out at him, blaming him for bearing his master to that fatal field.

But Sohrab looked up at the faithful steed, and called him by kindly names.

"How often has my mother told me of my father's terrible horse! She said I should one day find both the master and the steed. Come, let me lay my hand on your mane." And he reached painfully towards it. "Oh, Ruksh, you are more fortunate than I. You have gone where I shall never go,—snuffed the breezes of my father's home and trod the sands of Seistan.

Zal himself has stroked your mane and fed you with wine-soaked corn from a golden platter. But I have never known his face nor seen his lofty house. I have lodged only among my father's foes here by the yellow Oxus where I am to die."

"Would I were beneath its waves!" groaned Rustum.

Sohrab answered in a grave, mild voice: "No, father, you must live! Some of us are born to do great deeds, and some to die. You must do the deeds that I die too young to do. You are my father, and the gain is my own. But come! Here are my followers, my loyal host." And he waved his hand towards the Tartar camp. "You must not slay them. They followed me. They were my hope and fame. Let them return in peace. But bear me away with you. I must not go back with them. Carry me to Seistan, and place me on a bed, and mourn for me,—you and white-haired Zal and all your friends. Then lay me in earth, and make a stately mound over me, and plant a tall pillar in its midst, so that the passing horseman may see it far off on the waste and say, 'Sohrab, the son of mighty Rustum, lies there, slain by his great father in ignorance of his kinship!'"

"It shall be so, all as you wish," said Rustum; "for I will burn my tents, and quit the host, and

carry you to Seistan. What should I do with slaying now? Would that all I have ever slain might live again,—even my bitterest foes, through whose death I have won fame,—that you might live also, my son, my son! But my youth was all of blood and battles, and so is my age, and I shall never end my life of blood!"

"One day you shall have peace," said Sohrab, "only not now,—not yet. It will come on the day when you sail back, you and the other peers of Kai Khosroo, over the blue sea from laying your dear master in the grave."

"Soon may that day come!" said Rustum, with musing eyes. "Till then, if fate wills it, I must endure."

Then Sohrab smiled contentedly, and drew the spear from his side, easing his wound. The blood came welling from the gash, and life flowed out with it. The crimson torrent ran down his cold white side. His head drooped, and his limbs grew slack. He lay motionless and wan, with closed eyes; and only when the deep gasps quivered through him, convulsing him back to life, did he open them and fix them feebly on his father's face. Then, at last, the struggling spirit passed out, and Sohrab lay dead.

Rustum drew his horseman's cloak over his

dead son's face, and sat by him like a fallen pillar in the waste.

Night came down upon the solemn landscape, concealing the two hosts, and a cold fog crept up from the Oxus. Then a hum of voices arose, and fires began to twinkle through the mist. Both armies had moved back to their camps for the evening meal.

But Rustum and the son he had slain were left alone on the open sands.

ROBERT BRAWN

THE TWO BABES.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

THE TWO BABES.

"HERE's health, and better fortune to you!" said Hugh Baird, as he raised his glass in Sandie's tap-room. He drained off the draught, smacked his lips, and set down the empty tumbler. "Houch, but it's strong!" He twisted his mouth into a pleased semblance of distaste, then winked. "But, sure, Sandie's whiskey's a tipple for kings!"

The Sabbath bells were sounding outside in the tranquil sunlight, but Hugh Baird liked better to spend his holiday among boon companions at the inn. He was a well-to-do farmer, dressed in tartan breeks, and he lounged at the bar with one hand deep in his pocket, as if seeking imaginary guineas, while the other caressed his glass. He was fond of talk, and fond, above all, of directing his talk against the godly-worldly folk of the village. He liked his dinner hot of a Sunday: they liked theirs cold. They went to church: he went to Sandie's parlor. Hence there was a year-long feud

between the pious church-goers and the lusty sinner.

"Do you see that little minnow of a man over there?" asked Hugh Baird, elbowing a stranger. A stranger was his peculiar prey, for he could pour out all the threadbare tales of the town to him and still find a ready listener. "Well, that's Matthew Bell. He holds his head as high at the kirk or a fair as Sir Walter of Wimplepen. The Lord preserve us! did you mark the look the saint gave to the sinners as he passed us by? Why, man, from here to John O'Groat's you'd not find a manikin who knows more about the Book of books, or half so much about that mighty book, the Ledger! Rich? Ay,—as his fields of gold-tasselled wheat! Out of his hundred acres he reaps year after year a bonnetful of gold. He lives up there on yonder hill where the harvest lies so yellow in the sunlight."

The stranger was curious about the godly farmer, and drew out without much difficulty his whole story, which was something like this:

Years ago there was a child born to Matthew Bell, as sweet as any little one ever held at a nurse's breast, and when the lass was tall enough to touch Matthew's watch-chain with her golden curls her mother died. The country tattle said that her husband's dismal pictures of the Pit

had frightened her up to heaven before her time.

But Maggie, as they had named her, lived and grew up; and, Sabbath-mad as Matthew was, he could never draw a cloud over her happy smiles. Later, when she laughed and played on her mother's grave, or, seated on his knee, seemed to throw sunshine on his gloomy eyes, Matthew lacked the heart to chide her even if he could.

But it was hard to tell whether Matthew thought most of Maggie's golden hair or of his golden wheat. No one knew his thoughts. If ever he dreamed of one whose gleaming locks lay beneath the grass and flowers, or fashioned, as fathers will, pictures of Maggie in her bridal dress, with a grand dowry and a holy ring, he kept his visions to himself. Yet, whether he did or did not, Maggie grew like a lily in the gloom: fair and slim as a lily indeed she was when sixteen summers had turned her eyes from blue to deeper blue and touched her hair with a new lustre. Matthew Bell's household kept the Sabbath through the whole gloomy week, and from morning to night poor Maggie's head was dinned with Scripture phrases and puzzling texts. To sing or dance, like other girls; to read a paper or fairy-tale; to eye herself in the looking-glass,—all this was stark damnation, prompted by the devil himself.

Maggie's lot was indeed a weary one. Her yellow hair was fastened up in a frowzy net and hid beneath an outlandish bonnet, and her dress was mean from head to foot, with not a single fine-colored bow. Such a pitch did this come to at last that when she saved a pound and secretly bought herself a bonnet fit to wear, her father threw it into the fire. "Vanity!" he growled, and Maggie fell to weeping.

Thus it came that her friends christened her Quaker Maggie, and she mourned over her shame all alone until, in her heart, she came to hate the Sabbath-day, and preaching, and the very Book itself, because they brought her a life of scorn. What wonder that she looked with envy at lovely ribbons in the caps of other girls?—that she thought far less of what the preacher said than of the giggling smiles the lassies cast from the pews all around at her old clothes? What wonder, indeed, that when her father questioned her about the text, she knew just as much about it as a child who pastes his nose against a candy-shop window knows of the moon? This kind of thing in time made Maggie a little sour in temper. In truth, she grew as dull and peevish as a school-boy in the sulks. Then, one fine day, her father went off and brought home another wife.

Mistress Bell the second was as holy as the

Pope's big toe. She was half a yard taller than Matthew, and, besides, she was a widow. She came of an ancient house, and, the gossips said, stooped from her station in allying herself with a ploughman's blood. She was as tall and lean as the Highland firs, and sharp-featured as an ancient Virtue vexed with influenza. Her nose was like a glowing cinder, and her sharp-cut mouth was always drawing in and out, while her small hen's eyes seemed to say, "Confess, now, am I not a credit to creation?" Day and night her sole cry was "Vanity, vanity!" and she was forever hurling the vengeance of heaven at all the comely hussies she met. You may well guess that when she came to Matthew Bell's house and saw how pretty Maggie was she loved her no better than a bat loves the sunshine. There was scolding and tears, scolding and tears, from morning till night. This thing was wrong and that thing was wrong. Maggie could never bring herself to call such a gray mare mother; and as for her grim father, very often a fellow-feeling made his cankerous heart pity his child a bit, but it was as much as his ears were worth to cross the Clishmaclaver. Maggie soon began to use her own tongue to answer back. She spoke words that bit like an adder's mouth, but she was sorely vexed to it.

The sun shines on, no matter how much

mortals wrangle. The earth grows fruitful and the seasons come and go whether men live or die. The land was spreading acre on acre around the farm, and the money rang plenteously into Matthew's pouch; for, in spite of all those pious ways of his and of his domestic troubles, the canny farmer never forsook his task of making and increasing. Year by year his bank-books and ledgers grew fatter, and year by year the farm, with its slated room and white doors and walls, stood on its hill amid the harvest home like a pearl in a lady's yellow hair.

Before Maggie had reached her teens a certain lad with long limbs and pockets as empty as last year's nest came lounging up to the farm, seeking work. His name was Robin Anderson, and Matthew sent him out into the wheat with a reaping-hook, and bade him work away and show his mettle. Before the sunset had made a picture of the harvest above the hills the lad had earned a strong man's wages. Matthew was pleased. He said little, but he gave the boy a bed out in the byre, and there he slept alone among the cattle.

He was indeed a clever lad. He worked lustily at shearing grain, and won praise, and money as well. He was as strong as a stallion, but as modest in his ways as a mouse. When

the Sabbath came round and Matthew cast his eyes about the kirk, whom should he spy there, a sheep among the flock, but Robin! The laddie's eyes were cast modestly on his book; his jet-black hair was combed neatly behind his rabbit-ears; his poor clothes were patched and brushed clean, and butter seemed melting in his mouth. When he met his master's gaze he blushed like a maiden and seemed ashamed to be seen.

Ah, indeed was he a clever lad, with fox's eyes and in lambskin gear. Kirk over, Matthew took him by the arm, and, with a grim, inquisitorial look, questioned him on the text. Robin had by heart nearly every word the preacher had said. Matthew was hugely pleased to find him so good,—so grand a worker in the field and yet such a pattern at his prayers. "Keep on as you've begun, my lad," said he, "and you'll be a wealthy man before you die and go to glory."

After that Robin never missed kirk, night or morning. Then, later, he came stumping into the kitchen one Sabbath night with an old torn Bible in his hand, and with hums and haws and much fear of giving offence, begged the farmer to expound a text that puzzled him. Now, nothing pleased old Matthew better than a chance to show off the Grace of God and his own Scripture learning at once. He smiled and

took the book, put on his specs and read, and, as he did so, expounded the text with worldly-wise comment of his own. Robin stood by him in awe and saw it all plain. He thanked the teacher with a kind of famished look, and, with a sigh that seemed to rend his very heart, wished he were half as holy and good and learned as Matthew. After that he came often into the house on other errands, and would listen to the old farmer like a hungry sheep. He grew so pious and holy, that when the wheat was harvested, and strained and put with a golden glitter into the bank in town, Matthew paid off the crowd of other reapers, but kept Robin Anderson as a laborer about the farm.

Robin was deep in knowledge both of figures and of the Book. He taught himself to read and write and do sums while sinners were at play. He never spoke bad words nor tasted drink. Day by day he throve in his master's esteem and rose in position, until, when the house was stormed by Mistress Bell the second, he played his cards so adroitly, and seemed so mild and meek, that she was won to like him and tuck him under her maternal wing. To make the story short, by dint of bowing, praying, and laboring the clever chiel throve so well in the holy household that at last Matthew made him overseer, and found out, in time, that the head

and hand of Robin Anderson were as needful to his life as meat and drink themselves.

Meanwhile, what of poor Maggie? Year by year she had waited and worked and wept, seeing her mother's pitying eyes look down on her from among the stars. "Oh, mother, are you there? And may I come to meet you?" she would murmur in her bitterness of heart; but in spite of tears and anger and weary pain, Maggie was bonnie,—grew bonnier year by year. Against her will, and in very perverseness, health loved her so that it clung about her like an ivy-vine, would not forsake her, giving and taking beauty. She was pale, to be sure, but it was the pallor of the full-blown lily, not of disease. The passionate appeals made day and night to her mother put new gleams of heaven's violet in her eyes. The sunshine which sparkled in her hair tangled itself like ears of golden wheat. The tears she so often shed weighed at her lashes like dew-drops, and gave her head a drooping grace sweeter than more ruddy boldness. Sombre gear, old-fashioned raiment, and the like, served only to make her beauty plainer. All the scorn and arts which were meant to hide her beauty and humble her were lost on Maggie Bell. They fell as darkly and coldly as murmuring rain in a bed of flowers. Through it all the flowers lift their heads and try vainly

to shake off the drops, looking the lovelier for their load.

Time wore slowly on till Maggie was sweet and twenty. Half the country-side went wild over her face, and the other half about her dowry. But what of that? Old Matthew's keen eyes were looking high for a man of godliness and wealth to marry her and add to his fame. Nor would Mistress Bell have any idle loons hanging around the farm; it was neither right, safe, nor delicate, and it seemed that Maggie herself cared very little for the sport.

Strange, though, that she should take to Robin Anderson. But she did; and Matthew never guessed it, nor did the Clishmaclaver have a suspicion. Many a kindly turn the sly lad did for Maggie,—many a time screened her from storm. Then, just when Maggie's beauty was full-blown, a change came over him. He went to kirk none the less, but it was plain that he was ill at ease and vexed with troublesome thoughts. Often when he was spoken to he would start and blush and seem ashamed, like one detected in a theft. In kirk he forgot to look at his book and glanced nervously about him. But, in truth, Robin was kinder-hearted than he wished to seem, and, what was more, passionate, in certain fleshly vanities, like other men, from Adam downward.

At last the lilies on Maggie's cheek grew sickly, and an icy glitter struck the sweetness from her eyes. She made angry answers to those who chid her, and the echoes of her footsteps, that had once fallen as soft as snow-flakes, went hollowly up and down the house. Her father watched her with his wary yellow eye, and the Clishmaclaver shrugged her old back and sneered and muttered something she dared not speak out, for she saw that Maggie's fiend was up. Robin Anderson, with oily grace, tried hard to make them all agree, but in vain. By and by it was clear that Maggie was wandering in a kind of mist. When she was spoken to she listened dreamily like one who hears a distant bell; and she, who had been a pattern of cleanliness, became as heedless of the world's judgment as the nettles in a country lane.

This could not last long. Harvest-time came once more, and the reapers flocked up to Matthew's farm. All around his wide acres the fields were thick and yellow with ripe grain. A buzzing murmur of labor rose from the land, and the shadows of the clouds passed across it in dark patches, with spots of sunshine in their wake. Never had the moon's horn been filled so high with ripeness and fragrance. The very heart of Matthew crowed as loud as a cock. But on the Sabbath-day, the first of harvest,

the farmer and his wife sat in the house with Robin and talked of holy matters, spiced now and then with thoughts of gain, till it was time for prayers. When the hour came and all were summoned, Matthew looked around and asked,—

"Where's Maggie?" But no Maggie answered.

Mistress Bell went flying from room to room, while the cry for Maggie passed out of the house into the fields and byres; but still she was not to be found.

At last a cotter's lass ran up, barefooted and pale.

"Oh, mem!" she stammered, "Mistress Bell! Mister Bell! You're looking oot for Maggie, are you no'? But Maggie's gane!"

"Gone! Gone where?" asked a dozen voices.

"Oh, mem, to Edinglass. I met her, all her lane, down the lawlan', and she was greeting sair. When I looked she stayed and tell't me a', and bade me gie this message to her faither: 'Tell him, Meg,' says she, 'I'm gawn awa',' says she, 'for gude; never to come back; but that I pray the Lord may never be hard wi' him as him wi' me, nor bring him to as sair a shamefu' end.' Then she slipped awa' afore I kenn'd what she meant."

There was a wild to-do. Old Matthew glared like a man gone mad. The Clishmaclaver fainted. The reapers searched far and near along the

roads and down in the village, but they looked in vain.

Yet Maggie did not reach Edinglass that night, nor the next, nor many a night after. As she ran on in the moonlight she was stricken by a swoon, and her limbs held out just until she gained a cotter's door. Clinching her teeth and hands, she fell on the threshold. The cotter's wife, who knew her, carried her in, and there she lay helpless. Before the pale dawn stared at her with its dead-man's eyes there came a fitful little cry, which Maggie shrieked to hear.

Such news spreads quickly. Before the day was over poor Maggie's shame was common talk over the whole country-side. The black news came to Matthew where he himself worked in the field with the hook, so eager was he for the harvest gain. He called down a curse on Maggie and her child, and clinched his fists to scream out his godly thunder.

"Go to the lassie,—go to her at once!" he cried to Robin Anderson, who listened with drooping eyes. "Go to her and tell her, if she ever crosses my path again I'll draw my fist across her shameless face and tread her under my feet. Tell her so! Tell her that, day or night, be it sowing or harvest, my prayers will call a curse on her head!"

Robin strode away without saying a word. He was as grim as a thunder-cloud. Before an

hour had passed he came back to the field and told his master that he had done his will.

"What said she?" asked the farmer, frowning and grinding his heel into the stubbly soil.

"Naught," said Robin, shortly; and he turned away biting his lip and scowling on the ground. He worked on in silence till the day was over.

Very bitter was Matthew Bell's heart, and all his pleasure in the harvest was soured. But when the Clishmaclaver began that night to rail at Maggie and her shame, the grim farmer sharply bade her hold her peace, and not to mention Maggie again. She knew he was determined to have his way, and she stopped short, looking as sour as buttermilk.

The house grew dreary and silent, and Matthew took the Book, put on his specs, and tried to read; but the specs became dim with the moisture from his eyes, and, with a cry almost like a curse, he closed the Book and rushed out into the darkness.

Who could fathom his thoughts? Were they sad, and did pale conscience put on mourning? No one knew; but for long, weary hours Matthew wandered out among the wheat, saw the stars loosened one by one from the night's gray robe; and then, at break of day, returned, with his eyes grown crimson; but not through weep-

ing. His cheeks were as pale as frost on a gray window-pane. But at the edges of his lips the cat's-claws showed that a selfish fiend had possession of him.

The neighbors, rich and poor alike, were little loath to see Matthew's pride and his wife's conceit taken down. Scandal echoed like a chime of bells out of tune from cottage to cottage, till the whole place was jingling with its discords. With this cruel clangor in her ears, poor Maggie clasped her child and fled away to Edinglass. Into the city's cloud of life she faded like a brownie into the mist.

Though the Clishmaclaver made a good deal of a fuss, she was strong in constitution and had a heart not easily broken. Poor lamb! she bore her trouble as if she were a saint in stone. But Matthew went about with a mildewed heart. He never wept, and worked like a horse. He was absent-minded, and his wandering eyes would drop from your honest look to the ground. His shoulders took to stooping, too; and when a lass or a lad went wrong, his voice among the elders was not so loud in rebuke as of old.

The pious Robin Anderson seemed also to be burdened with a bitter load. Shame weighed heavily on him. Once or twice, when he was vexed at trifles, he was heard to swear; and when the harvest was all in, he came as from a

funeral. The nights grew long and cold, and the winter passed. In mid-winter came a rumor that Maggie lived the life of the thousands who were dead to dying in Edinglass. A flush like crimson fire swept across Matthew's face. In the gusty gloaming, by the ingleside, he fairly fell on Robin's breast, screaming her mother's name to the whistling of the wind.

But before May arrived old Matthew had forgotten his shame and sorrow in a new joy, that came just on the edge of finish, like a kiss that hangs on a dewy lip in incompletion. The stars had smiled on the lap of Mistress Bell, who promised at last to obey the text: Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth—but in a decent manner. When May came blushing up among her roses, a plump babe hung around the neck of Matthew's wife, which she in turn clutched with a conscious pride.

Matthew's heart was high. His old lungs were as loud as chanticleer. In his joy he could have hugged the very midwife, if she had been less notable for snuff and snappishness. It was untold bliss to have a son and heir who would keep his memory green after he was gone, and multiply his siller.

But there was one, only one, on the farm who seemed not to welcome the baby. That was Robin Anderson. At eight-and-twenty the sly

Robin was a man of power. He was full six feet high, with whiskers like a fox and eyes that were deep-set under calculating brows. He always avowed himself above all corporal lusts and vanities, and when he was asked if he meant to marry he would flout the notion. "He marry! Buy a kiss in kirk, then strangle his freedom with an apron-string! Waste his substance on a pack of noisy youngsters ranged like polished pots in a tavern? Not he!"

When the joy over the new-born heir was at its full, Robin went very little into the farmhouse. Once when they brought the infant to him as he sat by the kitchen fire he snickered out a feeble smile, and touched it with his great forefinger as one inspects some curious fish. He seemed half afraid it would bite. When he was sorely pushed, he confessed it was a bonny bairn, but with a long-drawn sigh, as if the bonniness were a sad thing to see. After that, do all he could, and clever as he was at acting a part, he never showed any liking for the child. God knew what was in his heart, but it seemed to Robin that he could have dealt better with a full-grown man than with such a restless and fretful little thing, which he quite lacked the art to handle. At last he fairly threw all shame aside and kept away from the child, as if it had been a biting cur.

Matthew was little pleased at all this, and the mother much less. She grew high and Matthew grew stiff, and, as the year wore on, both were colder. Robin was bothered sorely. He did not say much, and toiled on as usual, late and early. He went to his work blackened in sanctity to the very finger-tips; and he often rode to Edinglass to spend a whole day with his cousins, as he said. But sometimes in the harvest-field when no one was by, Robin would hear a weakly voice moaning among the wheat. A tearful sobbing filled his ears when the autumn rains fell; and in his soul he saw the image of a child battling with fiends. He grew to hate himself, and to loathe the cold snake that shed its slime on his heart.

Then once again came the harvest. The reapers went afield, and the acres were rich and yellow with the ripe grain. The golden showers fell like a garment rustling to the knees of beauty, and from fence to fence ran the shout of the merry toilers. In and out through the sheaves the gleaners ducked and rose with brimming hands. Robin worked alone in a half-reaped field paved with sparkling stubble. He had tied his colored handkerchief about his loins and wore a broad-brimmed straw hat.

At noon, Mistress Bell came out from the house bearing the babe in her arms. She

walked down among the harvest-home, raising the little one up to see the fields and the reapers and the bright sun above them. The little man crowed with delight and waved his hands, blinking with blue eyes at the sun. He smiled and leaped for all the world like a stray sunbeam flickering about his mother's breast. As fate decreed, the good-wife walked down to the very spot where Robin was bending at his work in the grain. Love and joy, and pride in the happy harvest, had almost made her bonny that day. Just as she reached the place where Robin stood, a clamor of men in loud and fierce contention rose in the neighboring field. Half surprised and half curious, she carefully placed the child on a heap of fallen wheat, and hastened as fast as her old legs could run to look over the low hedge that divided the fields.

As fortune planned it, she had laid the bairn very close to Robin, and peeping under the sheaves of wheat, too wee to harbor malice, it saw the stalwart reaper; laughed and blinked its blue eyes, stretched out its plump pink hands, and cried aloud. It would have tumbled out of its yellow bed had Robin not thrown his tools aside and ran over to help it.

"I'll watch it till Mistress Bell comes back, and that may help to heal up the old offence," thought Robin.

The baby lay still, blinking sagely, as if it knew the doubt in the mind of this gloomy man whose hollow eyes looked half afraid of it. Then the sunshine, the merry sights and sounds of the harvest, the happy light and peace, and the plenteous gifts of autumn mixed with the smiles of the little one and swam in a serene vision to Robin's heart. A gush like mother's milk filled that heart, warming it until it leaped for fun. Robin laughed aloud and colored crimson. But Mistress Bell still stayed gossiping across the hedge with some one she knew, and half forgot her charge, feeling a dim consciousness that it was safe.

Was Robin daft or drunk, or was he both at once? He leaned down and tickled at the infant's throat and poked the dimples in its chin, until it crowed and kicked and flung its arms about and jumped for joy. Fairly maddened with a reckless pleasure, this holy and clever chiel, this big-boned reaper, Robin Anderson, caught up the wean and tossed it in the air, rocked it in his arms and tousled it all over. A mother in her teens could not have been more tender or more thoroughly happy.

In the midst of his glee Mistress Bell came back. Robin did not see her, but laughed on, madly tossing the screaming bairn. Suddenly he turned and caught her eye.

"What, Robin!"

The reaper held up the babe, blushing with heat and shame. He eyed it sheepishly, as if doubtful whether to keep it or let it tumble. He scraped with his feet in a helpless way and cast down his eyes.

Gasping like a startled hen, Mistress Bell took the child from him. She gave Robin one long look, and walked away stupefied. The very Deil himself, had he stolen up and worked a miracle under her nose, could not have caused her more astonishment.

Robin was as shamed as he could well be. He bound sheaves all day with his gloomy eyes on the ground. But night came at last. The harvest fell asleep under the stars, and the reapers went home. Robin stayed a long time outside in the dark, grumbling, delaying, and afraid to meet the eyes of the farm-women. Then, partly moved by hunger and partly by pride, he strode into the kitchen with a big defiant lounge. The laborers were there, men and women both, dipping into the porridge-bowl with wooden spoons. Between the knees of a strapping girl was Master Matthew Bell, the son and heir of the house. Mistress Bell was not present.

When the child saw Robin Anderson, he crowed aloud, kicked and laughed and tumbled across

the maiden's knee. Before Robin knew it he was at the bairn's side tickling and tousling him. He seemed urged on to the sport in defiance of the inward prompting against it. He cast his eyes around now and then with a quick resentment; but there was, nevertheless, an untold sweetness at his heart.

Every one in the room stared at him, but no one said a word. Laughing eyes sparkled across at each other, and wondering looks passed about. Robin's frenzy grew till the little treble and the big haw haw—like a giant and a gnome at play—rang merrily out above all other sounds.

After that night no better friends could be found than Robin and the wean. But stranger still was it that Robin seemed to have learned in that one night the art of pleasing the child, of holding it in his arms and hushing it asleep. The bridge once passed, he cared little what he did or said to it. Even under the eyes of Mistress Bell and Matthew he would feel no more shame in sporting with it than with a new-yeaned lamb. The farmer and his wife were pleased, and the ice thawed; and so time wore on till harvest came again and was gone.

But big Robin's heart was ill at ease. The snake still nestled there, and seemed to soil his very tongue with its venom. He went oftener to Edinglass now, and at home he brightened

only when his friend was by. On Sabbath he was the first at kirk, but with a gloomy face and gear of soot-black.

But when the harvest was over the child of Matthew's old age fell sick, and the farm took on its wonted silence. The doctors came, and a weak crying was heard in the night. Matthew was mad and Mistress Bell in tears; but nobody paid any heed to Robin, who would sit by the fire, glowering at the coals and listening with a hungry ear to those who stole through the house on tiptoe. Once he crept without shoes into the sleeping room where the bairn lay, and saw the pale little head on its mother's lap. He looked, but could not speak. A scalding heat came up in his throat. He stammered and blushed; but when he turned away his face was ghastly white. What did he feel and think?

Perhaps his thought was something like this: "If I were wedded and had such a child, and it should die for lack of such love as I could give it, would all the gold and silver in the world ever wipe its piteous face from my soul? Would all the prayers of a lifetime drown its dying cry in the hearing of the Lord?"

At last the little one fell asleep, and was dressed for the grave in its white Sabbath clothes. Old Matthew stumped about the house groaning deeply, grim elder though he was.

Mistress Bell wept silently and bitterly, with a grief that gave her quaint and homely face a double solemness. Again and again she kissed the frosty little lips, and smoothed the clothes on the white limbs to make them look sweeter.

In the silent hush of the noonday, Robin crept on tiptoe to the chamber where the child lay. He touched the tiny hands and looked into the baby-face. Death had filled it with shadows as ancient as the leaves over Adam's garden. He gazed as one landing after years at sea might gaze on a flower reminding him of the meadows where he played when he was a boy. He did not weep. Two dewy rings swam around his eyes, and, in a dream, he seemed to hear an infant crying far off, and to see two little hands lifted up from beneath his knees to pull him down for a kiss. So he crept away unseen and unheard, for he hated the silence of the house and longed to break it with a shriek.

For seven days the child had slept under the grass, and now the snow was falling. Robin rode away to Edinglass on business of his own. He stayed four days; but Matthew, so deep was his sorrow, scarcely heeded his absence.

One morning as the old farmer stood at the threshold of the farm-house, he saw a gig come trotting up the road drawn by his own piebald

pony. In the gig sat a man and a woman. The team came on and halted at the door.

With a cry of wonder, even of fear, Matthew saw that the man who drove was Robin Anderson, and that the woman who sat beside him, with a child tucked softly beneath her Paisley shawl, was his own sinful daughter Maggie. Both were pale and dropped their eyes; but Robin's teeth were firmly set together. Matthew could not speak a single word.

Robin helped the lass to the ground and led her up to the door. Matthew gave way before them and walked backward into the house.

"What's this?" he gasped. "Is it daft ye are? And have you forgotten?" His eyes glittered on Maggie with a kind of ghastly pain.

Robin took him by the shoulder and pushed him into the kitchen. "Wheesht awhile," said he, "wheesht awhile, and hear me out." Then he went on with his story: "May Clootie grip me, Matthew, but I have been a villain and a hypocrite, both in kirk and here, as friend and servant. It was me brought Meg to sorrow; but I stand here to take shame to myself—and, Meg's my wife!"

The farmer stared and gasped and clutched at the air with his hands, but did not speak.

"Father!" groaned Maggie.

He eyed her hungrily as if he would wither her, but made no answer.

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